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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# SOCIALIZATION OF BEGINNING TEACHERS IN RURAL ALBERTA

BY

JON ORD

©

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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Date: August 16, 1990

THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO HELEN WITH LOVE

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the socialization experiences of beginning teachers in one rural school district in northern Alberta. Six beginning teachers representing primary through senior high school grade levels in five schools were interviewed mid-year in order to record their perceptions of how they were socialized to the status quo in their respective schools. Forty elements of socialization experiences were drawn from transcriptions of the audio-recorded, semi-structured interview data. The perceptions of the interviewees suggested the beginning teachers were being socialized within three contexts of teaching. The ecological context represented those organizational givens and expectations inherited upon acceptance of a teaching contract. The psychological context subsumed intra-personal areas including feelings, beliefs and practical knowledge. The sociological context included those inter-personal relationships involving teachers, colleagues, students, administrators and parents and community. Elements which fell naturally into more than one context were accorded dual or global contextual assignments.

Findings of the study indicated little awareness or recognition of special needs of the beginning teachers. The relative lack of formal socialization procedures suggested that beginning teachers were expected to "sink or swim" on the basis of their own initiative and ability. Socialization experiences were found to be situation specific in that individual school staffs and school-based administrators represented the major socializing influences through personal and professional support and guidance. The research data revealed insights into the status quo of beginning teachers' socialization experiences. From these insights conclusions were drawn which held implications for teacher educators, central office personnel, school-based administrators, experienced colleagues and beginning teachers themselves.

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# Chapter 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### Introduction

The process of socialization to the role of teacher places newcomers to the profession in a variety of different settings and circumstances. Joyce and Clift (1984) noted that "the socialization of teachers has not been studied extensively" (p. 6) but speculated that "disillusionment is common; that there is movement from an idealistic performance-oriented stance to one of resignation to an intractable system" (p. 6). Such perceptions may be linked to evidence that neophytes leave teaching at a relatively high rate ( Deal & Chatman, 1989; Huling-Austin, 1987; Marso & Pigge, 1987). Given university graduates' personal investments of time, money and effort to become teachers it is reasonable to assume that decisions to opt out of the profession would reflect a certain degree of disillusionment and would not be made without a great deal of deliberation. The support systems encountered by first-year teachers in their socialization experiences might well play an important and critical part in helping newcomers to make a successful and satisfying transition from university student to classroom teacher.

The recruitment and nurturing of high calibre teachers has become a common agenda for educational leaders in many areas of the World. Problems confronting beginning teachers in their socialization experiences have been documented in, for example, Europe (Veenman, 1984), the United States (Joyce & Clift, 1984), and Canada (Fullan, Connelly & Watson, 1987). The notion that first-year teachers are facing similar problems throughout the World, however, offers slight comfort to

educational communities concerned about the potential loss of promising youthful recruits from an aging teaching profession. Moreover, lack of adequate socialization might well limit the potential effectiveness of beginners in their classroom teaching. A combination of these factors with the changing nature and complexity of the educational arena suggest that old assumptions about beginning teachers' preparedness to sink or swim without special consideration might require reassessment.

In northern Alberta beginning teachers constitute a significant percentage of staff recruitment each year. For example, one typical rural jurisdiction reported that first-year teachers represented approximately 50% of 90 replacement teachers employed between 1988 and 1990, (Smith, personal communication, January 17, 1990). It is believed that other rural school districts recruit higher percentages of first-year teachers annually. Given the geographic distances between many rural school districts and urban teacher training institutions in Alberta it follows that formal and informal induction to teaching experiences occur primarily at the local school level under the auspices of school and district administrators. Therefore, educational leaders in rural areas would benefit from understanding the problems and pressures experienced by these beginning teachers in order to implement strategies which provide adequate support for them in the initial stages of their teaching careers.

Of course there can be no easy solutions to the problems encountered by beginning teachers as many have existed for decades. However, much recent literature such as that by Lortie (1975), Bullough, Knowles and Crow (1989) and Veenman (1984) has focussed on the specific concerns and common problems of beginning teachers. Many of the expressed concerns raise questions about how, or even if, beginning teachers are being formally socialized to the school environment. These areas of concern are basic to the present study.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the socialization experiences of beginning teachers in one rural school jurisdiction in northern Alberta. Implicit in this study is the need to explore how newcomers perceive the contexts under which they learn to be practising teachers. Selected research questions to guide the study were:

1. How do beginning teachers learn about the philosophy, mission, values and norms of the school and the expectations placed on teachers?
2. What critical experiences did beginning teachers encounter in the classroom and in the school?
3. What were the positive and negative outcomes of these experiences?
4. What assistance and guidance did beginning teachers receive from school-based administrators and colleagues?
5. What implications for school-based administrators can be drawn from beginning teachers' perceptions of their socialization experiences?

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions have been used:

Beginning teacher — A university graduate engaged in the first year of teaching experience.

Socialization — The process by which new teachers come to acquire the perspectives and goals of those within the organization (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 17).

Orientation — The process by which new teachers are familiarized with work assignments and acquainted with the school district, students, staff and community.

Mentor — An experienced teacher who is a trusted advisor for a beginning teacher.

Induction — A formal program of support for beginning teachers usually coordinated by a central agency such as a university or school district.

**Significance of the Study**

This study has both practical and theoretical significance and its results should be of interest to teachers, teacher educators, school-based and system administrators, policy-makers and researchers.

Before we can understand the way future beginning teachers should be socialized we need to be aware of the status quo as to how socialization occurs now. This study will help us to understand the status quo. According to Neville Bennett (1988); "a central question being studied now is the transition from expert student to novice teacher. How do successful teacher trainees transform their expertise into a form that pupils can understand?" (p. 29).

Joyce and Clift (1984) claimed that little is known of the socialization process, and Floden and Huberman (1989) suggested that research which "focusses on teachers' own perspectives... could inform planning for school improvement" (p. 457), and "can aid in seeing how an improvement program can be designed" (p. 457). Although Floden and Huberman were directing their comments toward the professionalization of teaching, their position is pertinent to the socialization of

beginning teachers. They contended that "a coherent research informed agenda" relies on knowledge "of which determinants account for more or less productive" (p. 465) socialization experiences. Therefore, recognition of the present situation may help to sensitize school administrators to the productive and non-productive determinants, and the needs of beginning teachers.

The study may contribute to the present field of knowledge about the socialization of beginning teachers, by providing insights into how newcomers are oriented to the complex realities and responsibilities inherent in the teacher's role.

## Assumptions

Underlying the study were three major assumptions. The first was that beginning teachers, who became the participants, would respond honestly in the interviews and in self reports about their beginning teaching experiences. A second was that beginning teachers experience difficulties in socialization within the school environment and the research format selected would raise such problems to an observable level. The final assumption was that the socialization of beginning teachers could be affected positively and negatively by administrative practices.

## Delimitations

This study was delimited to the perceptions and experiences of six beginning teachers from one rural school system. The small respondent group was conducive to the semi-structured interview approach and made it possible to conduct in-depth interviews with each participant.

## Limitations

The researcher, a central office administrator with the system to be sampled, had been involved in the hiring of one of the teachers. A response effect such as bias in participants' answers to interview questions was always a possibility.

Results of this study may not be generalizable to beginning teachers in other school systems.

## Organization of the Thesis

Chapter One has introduced the nature, purpose and significance of the study. Chapter Two reviews literature that addresses the concept of socialization as it pertains to experiences of beginning teachers. Methodology, participant selection and setting are outlined in Chapter Three. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data collected and includes discussions of emergent themes. The final chapter of the thesis provides a summary of the study, reflections and implications for future research and practice.

## Chapter 2

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter seeks to sample the current field of research and knowledge relating to the socialization of beginning teachers. In order to achieve that purpose the chapter will be divided into six sections. Section one will represent the concept of socialization. Sections two, three and four will focus on the ecological, psychological and sociological contexts within which the process of socialization occurs. Section five addresses some factors believed to influence the process of socialization and the final section will be reserved for a general discussion of insights revealed in the literature review.

## Concept of Socialization

The concept of socialization has become an expanding field of research in recent years. Two common perceptions of socialization could be described as traditional and humanistic. Supporters of the traditional perspective hold that individuals are shaped by their organizational environment in order to achieve an appropriate fit (Gutek, 1987, Seaver & Cartwright, 1977). Humanists tend to reject this view in favour of one which supports individual development and self-determination within the environment (Combs, 1988; Lortie, 1975). Others claim that socialization cannot be an either or proposition because organizational realities necessitate a combination of the two viewpoints (Lacey, 1977; Nias, 1986). Although there may be many other views only these three will be expanded upon in this discussion.

Socialization is probably best understood as a "process by which new teachers come to acquire the perspectives and goals of those within the organization"(Rosenholtz, 1987, p. 17). A traditional view of this process would portray socialization as "the study by which employees are transformed from total... outsiders to participating and effective... members" (Feldman, 1976, p. 64). Daniel Feldman implied that individuals are shaped or molded after entry into an occupation. John Wanous (1980) supported Feldman's view with his description of socialization as "those changes caused by the organization that take place in newcomers" (p. 168), and noted similarities in the process among "diverse organizations such as business, schools, the armed forces and the police force" (p. 198). Many educators would probably take exception to beginning teachers' initial experiences being likened to those of military recruits. However, Deal and Chatman (1989) contended that "all occupations, professions, and organizations use a variety of socialization strategies to teach new members the 'correct' way to believe, perceive, think and feel" (p. 23). Susan Rosenholtz (1989) concurred when she stated that colleagues and principals "communicate [to newcomers] the 'correct' ideas, values, goals and ways of thinking and behaving" (p. 17). Therefore, although one might reject Wanous' traditional perspective, the comments of educational researchers such as Rosenholtz, Deal and Chatman suggest that new teachers are molded or changed to better serve the organization in which they are employed.

Jennifer Nias (1986) exemplified the humanistic view of socialization when she emphasized the preservation of a "sense of personal identity" (p. 3) within the process. She maintained that professional socialization is "an active process" (p. 3) in which new teachers retain a "sense of self" (p. 3). Dan Lortie (1975) captured the essence of the humanistic viewpoint when he referred to socialization "as a subjective process... something that happens to people as they move through a series of

structured experiences and internalize the sub-culture of the group" (p. 61). With specific reference to teaching, Lortie claimed that socialization of beginning teachers "is largely self-socialization: one's personal predispositions are not only relevant but, in fact, stand at the core of becoming a teacher" (p. 79). Lortie's terminology is clearly quite different to that of the traditionalists who spoke of "transforming", "changing" or "teaching" newcomers.

Carol Etheridge (1989) perceived the concept of socialization as a more interactive process involving both traditional and humanistic perspectives. She pointed out that "a growing body of literature... recognizes teacher socialization as a two-way street involving interaction between institutional factors and the novice teacher" (p. 31). Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) also proposed "an interactive view of teacher socialization in which individual intent and institutional constraint both play a role" (p. 10). These researchers represent a middle ground in respecting both the subjective reality of the teacher and the institutional reality of the organization.

The concept of socialization appears to involve the competing goals of different stakeholders. On the one hand the organization requires of its members a degree of conformity to the institutional norms. Such conformity to institutional givens could imply that some aspects of the socialization process may be viewed as being relatively impersonal. On the other hand is the beginning teacher's need for personal development and enhanced sense of identity which suggests an intra-personal focus. Although the concept of socialization appears debatable it would be reasonable to assume that such experiences constitute a crucial, professional phase for both organizational and individual stakeholders. A consensus of opinion in the literature, however, indicates that the process of socialization has been left to chance by the organization (Deal & Chatman, 1981), and generally achieved through informal means among teachers (Pataniczek & Isaacson, 1981). Margaret Buchmann (1987) pointed

out that "on the whole, formal socializing mechanisms in teaching are few and short in duration, not very arduous, and have weak effects" (p. 161). Under such circumstances the workplace becomes the dominant instrument of socialization "during the formative early years of professional practice" (Eraut, 1985, p. 118). The institutional nature of the workplace, however, may promote a more traditional or impersonal view which is further discussed as socialization within the ecological context.

**Ecological Context**

The ecological context within which the process of socialization occurs has been variously described as the environmental, institutional or bureaucratic set of conditions specific to an organization. Christopher Clark (1978-79) used the term ecological context to describe the "resources, external circumstances, administrative requirements, etc. that limit, facilitate and shape teacher... thought and action" (p. 55). Rolf Oerter (1989) referred to "the role of objective environmental conditions such as class size,... over which a teacher has no real control" (p. 938). Fullan, Connelly and Watson (1987) claimed that the industrial model of bureaucratically run organizations was "transferred to the evolution of schools as places of learning and work" (p. 63) and thus established public education as an institutional context within which teachers pursued their occupational tasks (O'Neal & Hoffman, 1984). According to Elisabetta Nigris (1988) teachers perpetuate the ecological norms by "adjusting to the bureaucracy" or "acquiescing to the status quo" (p. 11).

Although the terminology differs, many educators agree that public schools do have environmental givens to which new teachers are required to adjust. For example, Becher and Maclure (1978) contended that education, as a social institution,

"is not just a private matter" and "cannot be regarded as a purely professional operation" (p. 17). Therefore, when newcomers are being socialized within this context of "impersonal bureaucratic rules... and regulations... [they receive] varying degrees of information about what [is] expected of them and of the limits beyond which organizational sanctions would not be applied" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985, p. 16).

These realities of socialization raise serious questions of control that are receiving attention in the literature. How much control should the organization exert over the professional teacher? To what degree should teachers act as change agents to build new structures and perspectives in public education? Critics of the traditional bureaucratic model contend that it detracts from professionalism (Fullan, Connelly & Watson, 1987), fosters a more narrow and practical form of socialization (Fuller & Brown, 1975), and orients newcomers "to policies, procedures and plan books rather than to philosophy or pedagogy" (Deal & Chatman, 1989, p. 22). Rosenholtz (1989) noted "increasing bureaucratic rather than professional control in schools" (p. 215), and compared bureaucratic socialization environments to "production-line work [which] implies that teachers are nothing more than semi-skilled workers" (p. 214). Becher and Maclure (1978) , however, reminded educators that "society is entitled to take a hand... [because] establishing society's educational demands is a political act" (p. 17). Papagiannis, Klees and Bickel (1982) supported this view in their claim that public education is "an important cultural apparatus" (p. 254). Therefore, socialization to the ecological context actually prepares beginning teachers to uphold the cultural apparatus of society by maintaining "the very logic of the structure of social institutions" (p. 255).

The ecological context is situation-specific in that it differs among systems and schools within systems. It is also hierarchical in control mechanisms. O'Neal and

Hoffman (1984) conducted research which described the ecological context of four beginning teachers' elementary reading programs in terms of decision-making responsibilities at the state, district, school and classroom levels. They found that the state accredited basal reading programs, developed grade by grade reading curriculum and established state-wide basic skills assessment programs. The school district was responsible for time allocations, the philosophy of reading instruction, and student evaluation policies. The school principal made quantitative decisions regarding the distribution of students, amounts of money available, and time allotments for the reading program. Finally, the classroom teacher made qualitative decisions relating to materials to be procured, lessons to be taught and the assignment of students to groups within the classroom. In reality the teacher's classroom decision-making responsibilities toward the reading program were minimal given that the reading materials and lessons were largely pre-determined at other levels by accreditation and associated teachers' guides. Interestingly, the only beginning teacher who demanded a good deal of individual responsibility for her reading program "was the lowest rated of the four teachers studied" (p. 20). (The ratings were carried out by each teacher's principal).

O'Neal and Hoffman's research study encapsulated many of the elements of socialization within the ecological context. Schools as public institutions have implicit expectations that those who enter teaching will adopt certain normative behaviours and adapt to ecological givens. According to McPherson, Crowson and Pitner (1986), "the careful selection and socialization of organization members can represent a potent mode of control [for the principal]" (p. 89). Also, Joyce and Clift (1984) pointed out that for survival within the institution, beginning teachers must learn "how to manage the flow of classroom activities in a way that resembles the normative mode perceived by teachers around them" (p. 12). There is considerable support for

this appraisal of socialization within the ecological context (Deal & Chatman, 1989; Eraut, 1985; Nigris, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985).

For beginning teachers assigned to rural schools the relative geographic isolation establishes ecological conditions that differ from those in urban areas. For example, more limited access to resource centres, university services, libraries and the like, restricts early teaching experiences to the limitations of the ecological givens of the particular school or school district. This may translate into fewer opportunities to share with other first year teachers and greater dependence on the local organizational structure for considerations such as professional development through inservice and consultation. One could assume that this would lead to greater ecological dependency for rural beginning teachers. However, the results of Pickard's (1989) study of rural first year teachers suggested that such is not the case.

Notwithstanding the constraints associated with the ecological context of teaching, Pickard (1989) pointed out that "ambiguities in the operations of... schools undermined the thick veneer of... tradition" (p. 187) to the point that "the insular nature of [the] schools forced... beginning teachers to become more personally independent than bureaucratically dependent" (p. 187). He added that the implicit rather than explicit nature of organizations caused beginning teachers to perceive "their day to day teaching experiences to be only loosely connected [loosely coupled] to the formal traditional organizational structure" (p. 187).

**Psychological Context**

Christopher Clark (1978-79) used the term psychological context to include "implicit theories or beliefs and values about teaching and learning" (p. 55). For the

purpose of the present study Clark's perception of the psychological context appears to be narrow.Therefore, attention will also focus on the personal feelings individuals experience as a result of entry into teaching. Concerns have been raised in the literature that the importance of the psychological context within which beginning teachers are socialized has not been conceptualized adequately. For example, Calderhead (1989) claimed that "the processes of learning to teach are complex" (p. 49), and Veenman (1984) stated that "little is known about the cognitive and affective processes that characterize the transition into teaching" (p. 168). The traditional focus of teaching as being a behaviour (Bruner & Felder, 1983) tended to overshadow the mental lives of teachers, and research has only recently emphasized the importance of seeing teaching as teachers do (Clark & Lampert, 1986; Floden & Huberman, 1989). Bullough (1987) concluded from his study of the first year of teaching that:

> It is at this time more than any other that teachers need to be helped to think through their values in the light of the demands of the disciplines, characteristics of young people, the social responsibilities of schooling and the pressures of institutional life. (p.234)

Bullough expressed concern about how newcomers can survive professionally during the often psychologically stressful transition from university student to classroom teacher. Initial teaching experiences are commonly described in terms of survival (Cross, Leahy & Murphy, 1989; Fuller & Brown, 1975; Guskey, 1989; Huberman, 1989; Marso & Pigge, 1987; Pataniczek & Isaacson, 1981; Stewig, 1981) and practical dilemmas (Buchmann, 1987; Clark & Lampert, 1986; Huberman, 1989). In fact Guskey (1989), in reflecting upon his own initial teaching experiences, concluded that his psychological survival depended on his acceptance of certain limitations in himself and in the education system. This appears to be true in both rural and urban settings

(Wodlinger, 1986). Cross, Leahy and Murphy (1989), however, noted psychological pressures specific to rural teachers when they stated that "rural teachers are usually highly visible members of the community. Consequently, a teacher's private and professional life is known to everyone. Many individuals find it difficult to live always in the public eye" (p. 88). They expressed doubt that teachers who lacked positive attitudes toward such conditions would survive.

Garth Pickard (1989) noted that the five beginning teachers in his study of socialization entered their initial teaching experiences perceiving "themselves as competent young teachers with much to offer" (p. 187), ready to "give to the school organization in an effective and positive way" (p.194), share ideas, and "give of themselves" (p. 191) to their students. In many instances, however, these expectations were not upheld by what Pickard referred to as the organizational climate and organizational culture of the schools.

Pickard's findings are supported in much of the literature with references to beginning teachers' feelings of disillusionment (Guskey, 1989), inadequacy (Joyce & Clift, 1984), reality shock (Veenman, 1984), transitional shock (Corcoran, 1981), and discouragement (Zaharias & Frew, 1987). For example, Guskey (1989) reflected that beginning teaching left him "disappointed, disheartened" (p. 440) and convinced that emulative teachers in his own school career "were made of stronger stuff"(p. 440) than he. Manley, Siudzinski and Varah (1989) concluded that first year teachers "are usually idealistic in their thinking and frequently unrealistic in their expectations of teaching, [and] become stressed and anxious" (p. 16) during their initial teaching experiences. Veenman (1984) likened this process to "the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training" (p. 143). The loss of idealism portrayed in the literature (Olson, 1989; Pickard, 1989; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985) was noted by

Stewig (1981) as part of the psychological and emotional challenges that test teachers' survival skills in the induction phase.

According to Lortie (1975) "the beginning months of teaching... can be something of [a private] ordeal" (p. 73) but one that may contain "psychic rewards" (p. 101) which fluctuate from person to person Floden and Huberman (1989) noted that "to a great extent,... satisfaction in teaching is short term, sometimes as short as the 'exciting day', and depends on the kind of quicksilver events and relationships with pupils that have little inherent stability during the year" (pp. 463-464). Such feelings of success have positive psychological effects on self-concept and a developing sense of efficacy as a competent professional. Huberman (1989) pointed to some of the psychic rewards as being "the initial enthusiasm of teaching, the sharp learning curve, the headiness of having... one's own pupils, one's classroom, one's program; the pride and collegiality and of 'place' within a profession" (p. 349).

The psychological context also addresses the cognitive domain. This area includes the development of professional know-how and intuition (Eraut, 1985), theory and practice (Corcoran, 1981), the folkways of teaching (Buchmann, 1987), strategic adjustment (Etheridge, 1989), practical dilemmas, problem solving and decision-making (Clark & Lampert, 1986), and generally "the personal and idiosyncratic nature of the roles of teachers, in how teaching and the teaching role are understood" (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1989, p. 231). Calderhead (1989) suggested that learning to teach involves "complex interactions amongst [beginning teachers'] cognitive/metacognitive processes, their knowledge structures, affective predispositions, and their classroom practice" (p. 48). In short, beginning teachers soon come to realize that teaching is in reality extremely complex and that "teachers are more than technicians" (Holly & Blackman, 1981, p. 2).

Clark and Lampert (1986) contended that experienced teachers hide the complexity and uncertainty of the classroom arena and make teaching look easy because over time they have experimented and developed "a store of personal, practical knowledge about how to get their job done" (p. 28). Beginning teachers may hold technical knowledge from university course work but practical knowledge is acquired "only in practice and learned only through experience with practice" (Eraut, 1985, p. 119). Margaret Olson (1989) concluded from her study of four beginning teachers that "it was only through the painful struggle of learning to deal with pedagogical situations... that they were able to move toward becoming teachers" (p. 99). Fullan, Connelly and Watson (1987) pointed out that teachers' knowledge has both theoretical and practical components.

> There are theoretical ideas of subjects taught, of psychology, of professionalism, and of teaching. There is practical knowledge, won by experience, of how and what to do in certain teaching situations. Teachers build routines for classroom management, adopt and create rules and principles for encouraging student thought, and elaborate methods for units of study. (p. 55)

Although the process of "becoming a teacher" can be facilitated, the beginning teacher must inevitably make this psychological transition alone. In the process of newcomers trying out new professional skills they require considerable support and encouragement, and time to absorb new ideas, reflect upon them, and react to them. The process cannot be rushed (Dupuis, 1985).

The psychological context appears to be an area of vulnerability for beginning teachers in both the affective and cognitive domains. Zaharias and Frew (1987) addressed the problem when they said that beginning teachers need to know that assistance is available to them at this time.

> Such support is critically important in helping the neophyte internalize those skills associated with effective practice and cope with the anxiety of occasional failure. Without it, first year teachers may become overly discouraged and may prematurely abandon their teaching careers. (p. 48)

**Sociological Context**

For the purpose of the present discussion the sociological context will be limited to beginning teachers' social interactions with students, colleagues, principals, school district administrators, parents and community members. According to Mifflen and Mifflen (1982) the sociology of education includes the "study of social interaction as it pertains to the institution of education or schooling" (p. 39) and that a subjective approach to this study of society can be broadly termed as interactionism. They explained that interactionism "is concerned especially with the relationships which exist between society and the individual" (p. 41) because human beings are perceived as "thinking, feeling individuals, who attach meaning to the situation in which they find themselves" (p. 68).

The sociological context of the school appears to place the beginning teacher in a dual role of demonstrating skills while they are being acquired through experience. The first is an organizational requirement where the newcomer is expected to demonstrate immediately the ability to create and maintain a complexity of social systems and inter-personal relationships within the classroom. For example, Clark and Lampert (1986) spoke of interactive knowledge whereby "teachers work at establishing a [classroom] culture in which there is shared understanding of what is happening and where it is leading" (p. 29). Fullan, Connelly and Watson (1987) suggested that "a fully functioning teacher is one who can manage the complex social system of the classroom and diagnose in comprehensive ways the cognitive and social needs of students as individuals" (p. 58). Joyce and Clift (1984) pointed out that "a

teacher is responsible for building effective social systems in the school and classroom" (p. 12). In fact the act of teaching is in itself "a complex human helping task" (Thies-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987, p. 65) and schools themselves have been likened to "any socio-political system" (Fullan, Connelly & Watson, 1987, p. 65). There appears to be considerable support in the literature that "a large part of what guides a teacher's [work] is the goal of maintaining a productive social system" (Clark & Lampert, 1986, p. 29).

At the same time these beginning teachers are actively engaged in the process of acquiring, through participation and experience, the very necessary inter-personal skills that will allow them to fulfill their social roles, or which are prerequisite to the social roles expected of them. Buchmann (1987) emphasized the importance of such experiences when she claimed that "people acquire knowledge through participating in cultural patterns; such participation entitles them to being a member of groups and performing social roles" (p. 151). If experience and participation are key to the development of effective social skills how much time do beginning teachers really have in this regard? Clark (1988) rightly pointed out that the first weeks of the school year have been shown by research to be "a particularly important period... in as much as many of the routines, rules, relationships, and expectations that influence classroom interaction during the remainder of the year are... established during this time" (p. 8). Eraut (1985), however, stated that the inter-personal skills for "getting along with people... is an area of teacher knowledge... largely ignored in professional training... [or considered] as a skill to be acquired naturally on-the-job" (p. 81).

A weight of research evidence suggests that beginning teachers need and value the guidance and support of experienced colleagues during initial teaching experiences (Bullough, 1987; Butt & Raymond, 1989; Duax, 1989; Odell, 1988; O'Neal & Hoffman, 1984; Pickard, 1989). Sandra Odell (1988), concluded from three sets of

interviews, with 18 first year teachers, that experienced teachers were identified as being a greater source of assistance than principals, in terms of "dealing with challenges and concerns" (p. 7) encountered by novice teachers. Deal and Chatman (1989) noted also that the beginning teachers in their research frequently cited "the desire for increased interaction with teachers of the same discipline" (p. 26); and Zaharias and Frew (1987) proposed that "professional growth and development of beginning teachers is a socially mediated process... new teachers rely heavily on the guidance and advice they receive from trusted, more knowledgeable colleagues." (p. 49). The importance of beginning teachers receiving informal assistance and support from "a sympathetic veteran" (Poppleton, 1988, p. 13) is recognized in the work of many educators in the educational community including: Thies-Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1987), Fullan et al. (1987), Manley et al (1989), Anderson and Shannon (1988), Guzzetti (1989), and Duax (1989). This knowledge has resulted in the creation of formal mentor and induction programs (Duax, 1989; Ligon, 1988; Manley et al., 1989; Odell, 1988; Stone, 1987; Thies-Sprinthall & Sprinthall) being established in school jurisdictions in order to guarantee the availability of appropriate assistance for beginning teachers. For example, Stone (1987) described a school in California in which

> Two mentor teachers introduced newcomers to all aspects of the school, from where to get paper to how to get along with the faculty. This was an excellent opportunity for beginning teachers to learn all the "nuts and bolts" details and to have all their questions answered. (p. 34)

Anderson and Shannon (1988) captured the spirit of mentoring by describing the process as being intentional, nurturing, insightful, supportive, and protective. They advocated a context of "an ongoing, caring relationship between the mentor and protégé" (p. 40).

Bernice Stone (1987) suggested that school principals hold crucial roles in defining the organizational atmosphere or sociological context within the schools. The contribution made by principals to the socialization process, however, is generally viewed less positively in the literature, and includes a litany of advice and recommendations for school-based administrators. DeLong and Coombs (1986) emphasized the immediacy of greater communication between principals and their newly hired beginning teachers. Stone (1987) recommended that principals should personally make new teachers feel welcome in their schools. O'Neal and Hoffman (1984) demanded more of principals than to simply "listen to concerns and offer support and consultation when it is requested" (p. 11). Deal and Chatman (1989) listed the understanding of "important values, norms and practices" (p. 22) as meanings which principals should share with beginning teachers. Joyce and Clift (1984) criticized "the conditions manifested by weak principal leadership" (p. 6). McPherson et al. (1986) recommended that principals instruct beginning teachers in "expected patterns of behaviour" (p. 92). Others have suggested that school administrators be "more aware of the problems facing new teachers" (Adams, 1982, p. 43), and offer them stronger systems "of support or reward for their efforts" (Guzzetti, 1989, p. 68). The perception in the literature is that administrators either control, or should control, the socialization experiences of beginning teachers at the school level. In fact, Bruner and Felder (1983) found in their study of 164 secondary beginning teachers, that "15 of 19 highest ranked problems reported... [could] be handled by the direct action of school administrators" (p. 71), but such action was too often not forthcoming. Perhaps Odell (1988) encapsulated the situation in her research finding that "overall, school principals were not viewed as a particularly strong source of support by new teachers" (p. 8).

In defence of school-based administrators, it is reasonable to assume that good reasons exist for their apparent abdication of responsibility in these areas. Fullan (1982) proposed such a defence when he referred to the incremental nature of a principal's work load. In his terms the principal's role has "become more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past twenty years" (p. 130). He maintained that "most of the principal's time is spent on administrative housekeeping matters and maintaining order" (p. 132) and that "more and more responsibilities have been added to the role without any being taken away" (p. 134). These added responsibilities may impair the principal's ability to provide "appropriate professional advice, guidance and support" (Duax, 1989, p. 60). It is possible that the delegation of responsibilities for beginning teachers to experienced colleagues, may be more a matter of necessity than choice.

The community in which a school is located is another social system within which a beginning teacher is being socialized. Veenman (1984) described the first year of teaching as "an initiation into the adult world" (p. 148), and referred to experiences such as living away from home, looking for new accommodation and making new friends. Odell (1988) characterized the community as the "teaching context" in her study of problems facing beginning elementary school teachers. She reported that parent or family difficulties within the school or community were considered as persistent factors which made teaching difficult. Odell also noted that parental support received high ratings by beginning teachers as "factors which make teaching particularly easy" (p. 7). Veenman (1984) concluded from an analysis of 83 studies in nine countries that relationships with parents was rank-ordered fifth of the eight most frequently perceived problems of first year teachers. Interestingly, he maintained that the problem was similar in both rural and urban settings and at all grade levels of the school. One might assume heightened levels of public scrutiny of

beginning teachers' personal and professional lives in rural communities would tend to influence teacher-parent interaction in some way. In fact, Cross et al. (1989) acknowledged the different social realities encountered by beginning teachers in small rural communities when they stated that individuals who teach in rural schools must have positive attitudes toward living in a rural environment in order to survive. Perhaps beginning teachers who seek, or accept, rural assignments are those who feel comfortable in this type of social setting.

## Factors Influencing the Socialization Process

Much of the recent research on beginning teachers' initial experiences and socialization has focussed on the problems and concerns which confront the first year teacher. Veenman (1984) defined a problem as "a difficulty that beginning teachers encounter in the performance of their task, so that intended goals may be hindered" (p. 143). His analysis of relevant research conducted in the United States, West Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Australia, Canada, Austria, Switzerland and Finland, revealed classroom discipline as being "by far the most serious problem" (p. 160), followed in rank order by, "motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' work, relationship with parents, organization of class work, insufficient materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students" (p. 160). Veenman noted remarkable similarities in beginning teachers' problems in spite of obvious differences in "national and regional school systems, teacher preparation programmes and the working environments of the beginning teachers" (p. 166). Bullough, Knowles and Crow (1989) acknowledged Veenman's findings but added that "other types of problems, sometimes even more fundamental ones, are ignored" (p. 209). Such problems are commonly perceived as including

abruptness of entry, discontinuity between preservice and classroom teaching, isolation, and professional survival. Although the list is much longer, the remainder of this review of the literature will be limited to these factors.

**Abruptness of entry into teaching.** When comparing the entry into teaching with other professions Lortie (1975) concluded that "the circumstances of the beginning teacher differ" (p. 72) in that the first year teacher immediately adopts full responsibility for student instruction and classroom programs and "performs the same tasks as the 25 year veteran" (p. 72). Lortie's contention that beginning teachers are forced into a "sink or swim approach" (p. 60) of learning on the job through trial-and-error is supported by Adams (1982), Bullough (1987), Deal and Chatman (1989), Doyle (1985), Fullan (1982), Marso and Pigge (1987), and Ryan et al. (1980). The abruptness of transition from university student to classroom teacher has been described as traumatic (Marso & Pigge, 1987; Stone, 1987), and "results in an intense, stressful, trial-and-error period" (Stone, 1987, p. 34). Veenman (1984), likened the experience to reality shock which, for beginning teachers, leads to a loss of idealism in the "harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life" (p. 143). Ligon (1988) recommended that abruptness of entry be alleviated by ensuring every new teacher "an even break," allocating assignments carefully, not overloading new teachers, and providing a strong support system (p. 50). The problem of abruptness of entry into teaching is generally acknowledged, and there are those in the educational community who advocate mediated entry for beginning teachers (Ligon, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989) through systematic induction (Duax, 1989) and/or thoughtfully designed mentor programs (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). Deal and Chatman (1989) emphasized the importance of addressing the problem by pointing out that "the abruptness with which a teacher's first day begins, devoid of support from

the principal or colleagues, often sets the stage for weeks, months, and years ahead" (p. 22).

**Preservice.** A great deal of attention has focussed on how universities might better prepare students for the reality of classroom practice (e.g. Calderhead, 1989; Eraut, 1985; Erdman, 1983; Fullan, 1982). Preservice training has been criticized as being too brief and too weak, too theoretical and irrelevant, and too "excessively devoted to pedagogy" (Joyce & Clift, 1984, p. 5). Guskey (1989) determined from a survey study of teachers' perceptions of their preservice training that most teachers valued student teaching experience over course work in preparation for the realities of teaching. Fullan (1982), however, pointed out that the university experience could not fully prepare beginning teachers for the abruptness of entry into the profession, because of the impossibility of realistically simulating the complexities and dilemmas of unique, interactive, classroom environments. In spite of the acknowledged limitations of preservice training (Deal & Chatman, 1989), a research study by Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) led to a more positive conclusion that "the efforts of formal teacher preparation programs are not necessarily in vain" (p. 19). Perhaps the perceived limitations lie in traditional assumptions that teacher education programs are capable of thoroughly preparing graduates for the increasingly complex and demanding role of a teacher. The general tone of the literature suggests questions about a changing role of preservice training. Is university experience an end in itself, or a foundation for more practical learning in the field? Should the employing body accept a responsible role in the continuing training of beginning teachers? Educational opinion appears to agree that continuity of the learning experience is fundamentally important to these beginners and the teaching profession as a whole (Fullan et al., 1987).

**Isolation.** The literature reveals a consensus of opinion that isolation is a fact of life for teachers generally, but is one which magnifies problems for beginning teachers. Lortie (1975) explained this problem by stating, "since the beginning teacher spends so much of his time away from other adults, it falls upon him to discern problems, consider alternative solutions, make a selection, and, after acting, assess the outcome" (p. 72). Lortie pointed out that "the experience of teachers tends to be private rather than shared" (p. 160), and depicted the social and physical isolation of beginning teachers as leaving them "doubly alone" (p. 237). Lortie's assessment of the problems incurred by isolation is supported by Fullan (1982), Stone (1987), and Deal and Chatman (1989). Thies-Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1987) reminded educators that the "loneliness of teaching goes with the territory"(p. 76) but proposed "adult isolation" (p. 76) as being a major factor in teacher malaise. Joyce and Clift (1984) noted that the "cellular structure" for the physical organization of people in schools offers "domain authority" within the classroom, but gives teachers "little opportunity to work together to make collaborative decisions" (p. 11). Isolation of this nature appears to have both short and long term effects. According to Joyce and Clift (1984):

> Young teachers are socialized into those cells and the concerns that go with them. They are responsible for management, adaptation to individual differences, selection and organization of content, and evaluation. Because the task is overwhelming for most individuals, they solve their problems by closely following the text books.... The more successfully the young teacher adapts to the demands of the cellular organization the more difficult it is to make him or her part of the team with joint responsibility for the functioning of the school.... Teachers occupied in their cells are concerned with matters of their domains. (p. 11)

There is general support in the literature for a belief that thoughtfully conceived transitional programs, gradual induction programs and/or mentor programs hold benefits for experienced and inexperienced teachers in breaking down the tradition of

isolation in teaching (Adams, 1982; Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Duax, 1989; Fullan et al, 1987; Guskey, 1989; Ligon, 1988; Manley et al, 1989; Odell,1988; Poppleton, 1988; Thies-Sprinthall, 1987; Zaharias & Frew, 1987). Duax (1989) recalled the observations of school personnel involved in a program in inner London, England, who believed "that a whole staff benefits from interacting with new teachers during induction" (p. 62) and that such programs resulted in "better overall instructional quality, less teacher attrition due to frustration and isolation, and less need for supervisory intervention" (p. 63).

**Professional survival.** In the present context, professional survival deals with the problems and concerns which directly influence the potential success of beginning teachers' initial teaching experiences. Clark (1988) pointed out that little is known about helping to start inexperienced teachers to move in the directions of experienced teachers' thoughts, knowledge, planning and decision-making. There is a general belief in the literature that the first year of teaching is difficult and complex (Deal & Chatman, 1989; Guzzetti, 1989; Ryan et al., 1980) and that professional survival for the novice teacher is very real. For example, Guskey (1989) recalled from his own early teaching experience that "thoughtful reflection was a luxury he could no longer afford, classroom decisions needed to be made so often and so rapidly that most were spontaneous reactions... that flexibility and quickness of thought became [his] principal tools for survival" (p. 440). Guskey pointed out that nothing in his past experiences as a student "prepared [him] for the immediacy and diversity of the classroom environment" and a need for "wide ranging, general alertness to the multitude of activities and interactions taking place simultaneously" (p. 440). Duax (1989) supported Guskey's perceptions when he proposed that "teachers engage in 200 to 300 exchanges every hour of the working day" (p. 61), and Clark (1988) reminded educators that the "practice of teaching can be as complex and cognitively

demanding as the practice of medicine [or] law" (p. 8). Steven Janssens (1987) explored the types of survival concerns held by beginning teachers and described them as "self-concerns", "task-concerns" and "pupil-concerns" (p. 10). The results of Janssens' study indicated that the beginning teachers were primarily pre-occupied with task-concerns (51.5%) and self-concerns (44.5%). Janssens rank-ordered the task concerns as teaching, discipline, preparation of lessons, interaction with pupils and others, evaluation, and lack of time. He rank-ordered self-concerns as social interactions with colleagues, principals , parents, and pupils, and teaching itself. Janssens concluded that concerns appeared to be situational in that self-concerns heightened dramatically toward the end of the year possibly over concerns regarding contract renewal, while task-concerns lowered as the school year was winding down.

It becomes apparent from the literature that professional survival depends on a beginning teacher's ability to demonstrate competence in dealing with a host of social relationships and interactions, as well as a multitude of roles, tasks and functions. In short, to survive the first year of teaching novice teachers need to acquire the ability to "swim" and do so quickly, because they are immediately "faced with complex, fast-paced, consequential, and occasionally emotion-laden social judgements and action situations" (Clark, 1988, p. 6). It would seem reasonable to assume that professional survival for the beginning teacher depends on his or her resilience, tenacity and intentionality, along with thoughtful consideration and support from those in a position to best assist him or her through this critical career stage.

**Summary of literature review**

The review of the current literature revealed a consensus of opinion among writers, researchers and educators that the socialization experiences of beginning

teachers require serious attention at all levels of the educational community. The evidence forwarded by educators in several countries, suggested that the transition from university student to the professional responsibilities and multi-contextual realities of classroom teaching involves considerable difficulties which beginning teachers should not be expected to face alone. More ongoing, systematic support from experienced colleagues and administrators appears to be not only desirable but essential to the socialization process. In order to better understand that process, educational researchers are turning to the personal perceptions of beginning teachers themselves, to glean first hand evidence of the socialization experiences and clarify the prevailing circumstances which will in turn inform change in this area. The design of the present study, as outlined in the following chapter, seeks to assist in the development of this growing field of knowledge.

## Chapter 3

# DESIGN OF THE STUDY

### Introduction

This research study was an exploration of the perceptions of beginning teachers and the design was selected to seek understanding of how these beginners are socialized to the role of teacher.

Presented in this chapter are descriptions of the setting, participants, research design, instrument development and data collection. Data trustworthiness is addressed and the chapter concludes with a description of how the data were analyzed.

### Study Setting - Participating School Division and Schools

The jurisdiction chosen for the study encompasses a large geographic area in northern Alberta and serves approximately 3600 students in 11 public schools and one youth assessment centre. A fleet of 60 buses is required to transport more than half of the resident students to and from the seven communities in which the operant schools are located. Four Indian reserves and two Metis settlements are within the system's boundaries and contribute to the student enrolment. All schools are in close proximity to paved main highways and are dispersed on an east-west axis with the two farthest schools being approximately 200 kilometers apart.

Important to the study is the need to describe the pertinent aspects about the region and its schools. This school system is neither isolated nor inaccessible. The communities vary in population from about 300 to 5800 residents and economic bases include agriculture, lumber, tourism, fishing, trapping, and oil and gas. All communities have reasonable access to very good medical services including doctors, opticians, dentists, health units and hospitals. Transportation by airplane and bus is available and highways are well-maintained for year round use. A modern pulp and paper mill is being constructed at the eastern edge of the system. Hunting, fishing, boating, swimming, curling, ice hockey, figure skating, ringette, skiing, golf, camping, softball, slow pitch, baseball, badminton, tennis and square dancing are some of the recreational activities available. In addition, theatre groups, churches, service clubs, libraries and museums exist within the region. Government offices in the areas of social services, employment and Indian affairs are located in several centres.

A seven member board of trustees determines policies and general directions for the system and a modern well-equipped division office is located in the most centrally placed town. It is also in this town that most of the teacher inservices and teachers' association activities occur.

For each of the last eight years the central office staff has provided a one day orientation for teachers new to the system. The orientation takes place prior to the official commencement of the school year and includes: (a) a slide presentation/overview of the system, (b) an introduction of members of central office along with their responsibilities, (c) a prepared package and review of policies such as Duties of Teachers, Teacher Planning and Evaluation of Teachers, (d) samples of teacher planning, (e) school calendar, (f) welcome from a teachers' association representative, (g) distribution of the collective agreement, and (h) completion of the necessary payroll forms such as health benefits, addresses for the distribution of

salaries and personal tax credit returns. The concluding activity on this day is a wine and cheese social hour.

The 11 public schools range in enrolment from 42 to approximately 600 students. School buildings have been well-maintained and janitorial services are very good. In several of the larger schools there is some crowding because of high enrolments. By policy, maximum class sizes ensure that few teachers have 30 or more students at a time and average class sizes are less than 25. There are 22 school-based administrators, five of whom do not teach and the remaining 17 have varying allocations of time for administrative tasks. In 1988-89 there were 217 teachers of whom 24 were beginners and 1989-90 saw the employment of 221 teachers with 19 commencing their first year.

For the current year certificated personnel include 21 special education teachers, one library consultant and six school counsellors. A variety of programs is offered to students and examples are Francophone French, French Immersion, second languages of Woodland Cree and French, special education, vocational education, distance education and the regular K-12 as per provincial guidelines. Other services within the system are those of an educational psychologist and a speech-language pathologist. Parent advisory groups such as local school councils and Native Education committees are in place.

Prior to schools commencing each year administrators, teachers, secretaries and caretakers are to be found working in their schools. New teachers are usually able to gain access to their classrooms from mid-August until school opening. Personnel, including secretaries, at both the division and school level assist new teachers in securing appropriate accommodation. Every school has experienced

teachers on staff, some of whom have been long-term residents in their respective communities.

**Selection of Participants**

The researcher reviewed general background information and teacher assignments of the 19 potential respondents. The participants were selected so as to ensure some variability with respect to gender, age and teaching assignment. Male and female teachers were represented and ages ranged from 22 to 32 years. The participants differed in other ways: one teacher commenced mid-way through the first month of the school year; one was educated outside the province of Alberta; one had a split-grade; one had a full time special education position and one was a former student returning to a school from which he/she graduated. Primary, upper elementary, junior and senior high levels featured in the six teachers' assignments. In addition, three were the only beginning teachers at their respective schools, two were on the same staff and the smallest and largest schools of the division were represented. Participants were deliberately selected to represent all grade level divisions within the school system, in order to acquire knowledge of a broad range of socialization experiences.

All of the teachers selected had bachelor of education degrees. Four were placed in assignments commensurate with their training while two were teaching in fields outside their major areas of university study.

## Research Design

The proposed study was designed to provide insights into beginning teachers' perceptions of their socialization to the role of teacher. With this purpose in mind a semi-structured interview technique was adopted. Seven general questions were formulated and appropriate probes were included in the researcher's interview guide. The seven questions, in type-written form, were given to each of the participants prior to the initial interviews. A direct interaction between researcher and participant ensued with a prime objective being to attain, as recommended by Borg and Gall (1983), "a desirable combination of objectivity and depth." The respondents were cooperative, willing participants whose answers to questions and personal observations provided the data from which emerged understandings of how these new teachers were socialized.

## Interview Development and Pilot Study

The development of guiding questions for the interviews resulted from a review of the literature on the socialization and problems of beginning teachers. Research into the interview process assisted in the formation of seven questions aimed at eliciting from participants descriptions of their initial experiences as beginning teachers, and perceptions each had formed about the school, community and system environs. Probes for four of the questions were developed to be used where necessary. The seven prepared questions were as follows:

1. Why did you choose to teach at this school?
2. What critical experiences did you encounter during your first days, weeks, and months as a beginning teacher?

3. What were the positive and negative outcomes of these experiences?
4. What assistance and guidance did you receive from administration and colleagues at the school?
5. How did you learn about the philosophy, mission, values, and norms of the school, as well as expectations placed upon the teachers?
6. In what ways do you believe a school, or school system, can assist the beginning teacher?
7. As a teacher in the classroom, which three priorities would you consider to be most important?

A pilot interview, using the guide, was held February 15, 1990. The respondent was a primary teacher from a school system other than the one to be sampled in the study. The interview was audio-taped in a relatively quiet location at the University of Alberta. The researcher noted that the very small tape-recorder was not intrusive. Minimal note-taking on the interview guide allowed the researcher to listen attentively. The respondent had not been given the interview questions ahead of time, stated that the interview had been a positive, non-threatening experience and was open and frank in responses given. Interesting insights included the high priority the pilot respondent placed on classroom management, support from the principal and assistance from colleagues.

The pilot study served to test the questions and probes for the interviews, and provided the opportunity to practise interview skills and the utilization of the audio-taping approach. In addition, the researcher gained valuable experience in transcribing a taped interview.

The following decisions resulted from the pilot interview:

1. the seven general questions would remain unchanged;
2. the interviewer would make every effort to be as objective as possible by avoiding leading questions; and
3. the questions would be given in written form to each of the participants prior to the official interview. The latter decision afforded the participants the opportunity to reflect upon the questions days before the interviews.

**Data Collection**

Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Superintendent of Schools February 5, 1990. Over the course of the following two days the researcher approached the beginning teachers individually, informed them about the nature and intent of the study and requested their participation. Contact was made in person and all six agreed to be involved in the study. Once participation had been secured each teacher was given a letter which provided the ethical guidelines for the research. In addition a typed copy of the seven interview questions was given to each.

The tape-recorded interviews were conducted between February 22 and March 5, 1990 in classrooms, a participant's home, a school infirmary and a principal's office. The researcher made minimal notes on the interview guide, choosing to be an attentive listener as much as possible. Interviews varied in duration from 50 to 70 minutes.

A written transcript of each interview was prepared by the researcher and a copy mailed to the appropriate participant. Between March 19 and 21, 1990 the

researcher had discussions with the participants in their schools to check the accuracy of the transcripts and make changes where necessary.

**Data Trustworthiness**

The interview approach allowed the participants to express their perceptions of the realities of beginning teaching. Audio-taping assisted in providing accurate transcripts and probes were used to seek specific examples to better explicate the general thoughts of the respondents. Participants were informed prior to their involvement that the researcher would be the sole transcriber of the taped interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Care was taken to ensure that seating arrangements in the interviews gave the participant and the researcher equality of position, for example, across a table or either side of a teacher's desk.

Follow-up interviews revealed a high degree of accuracy was present in the transcripts. At the request of a participant the Christian name of one student was removed from a transcript and in one case the re-ordering of classroom management to the number one priority as per question seven was an amendment. All interviews and discussions were conducted in person. The researcher made notes concerning his observations as soon as possible after each interview. Peer review was carried out by an experienced teacher from the school system, who collaborated with the researcher in the allocation of elements to their respective contexts. Transcripts were reviewed by the researcher's advisor for the sharing of interpretations.

All participants received copies of the first draft of an analysis of the data with a covering letter dated May 3,1990, seeking feedback in relation to accuracy and confidentiality.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis commenced with initial teacher contacts. Background information regarding where each was born and raised, teacher training and teacher assignments was gathered prior to the taping of the interviews. The researcher kept ongoing field notes. Transcripts of interviews were colour-coded to facilitate easy identification and recognition of individual respondents. Key words, phrases and sentences were highlighted.

The transcribed interviews were subjected to numerous readings to allow the researcher to become familiar with an overall sense of each participant's perceptions. Elements of information were extracted from the six transcripts and compiled into a list of 40 items. Examples of categorized information were motivation of students, attitudes of parents, information overload and university experiences. This information was organized under 12 general headings. The colour-coded transcripts were cut up and elements placed in appropriate files under these same 12 headings. These provided rudimentary insights into the contextual nature of the data, and led to the emergence and formulation of context-based themes which are described and discussed as ecological, psychological and sociological contexts in the following chapter. Insights derived from this conceptual framework assisted in the interpretation of findings in the interview data.

## Summary

This chapter reviewed the setting, participant selection and methodology relating to a study designed to explore how beginning teachers are socialized to the role of teacher. Semi-structured interviews, with the researcher utilizing an interview

guide and providing participants with written questions, became the main instrument of data collection. The responses of the participants included descriptions of experiences, feelings and recommendations. Member checks for transcripts and analysis of the data were carried out to ensure trustworthiness of interpretation of information shared with the researcher. Data were categorized into 40 elements under 12 general headings from which context-based themes emerged. A detailed analysis of the data is presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

# CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE DATA AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This chapter is presented in two sections. The first section explicates the development and nature of a conceptual framework which was initially influenced by the data and which, in turn, served as an organizer for the data. The second section presents the findings of this study relating to the socialization experiences and perceptions of six beginning teachers in one rural school district in northern Alberta. Relevant findings are represented in seven sub-sections each of which contains data relating to a particular area of the conceptual framework. Each sub-section concludes with a discussion of the findings.

## The Development of a Conceptual Framework

The collection of data as described in the previous chapter resulted in the generation of 40 categories of information. This information was organized under 12 general headings of which three examples include initial experiences, students, and colleagues. Analysis of the data was approached with a view to finding connections. Patterns arose and the data began to reveal themes from which emerged the perception that the beginning teachers' information was falling into three broad contexts of a teacher's role. In terms of the data these contexts are ecological, psychological and sociological.

The ecological context within which the beginning teachers are being socialized is relatively impersonal and contains elements over which the neophyte

teacher has little or no control. It involves the conditions, expectations and constraints implicit in working in a school. The institutionalized nature of education results in a beginning teacher being placed in a position of inheriting these less personal elements the day he or she accepts a particular teaching assignment. Examples of elements within the ecological context include salary, location of the school, system policies, curriculum content and school routines. These elements of the teaching role have usually developed by means such as tradition, policy development and the mandates of education as an institution within society. The beginning teacher has few choices in these environmental givens and the ecological context is, therefore, one of the key areas in the socialization process.

There are intra-personal or psychological elements associated with the role of teacher and these emerged as the psychological context which addresses the feelings, values, beliefs and practical knowledge of the beginning teacher in the socialization process. For example, the newcomer's anxiety levels and mental stress resulting from abruptness of entry into the teaching role and extra hours on school-related tasks are intra-personal elements associated with being a first-year teacher.

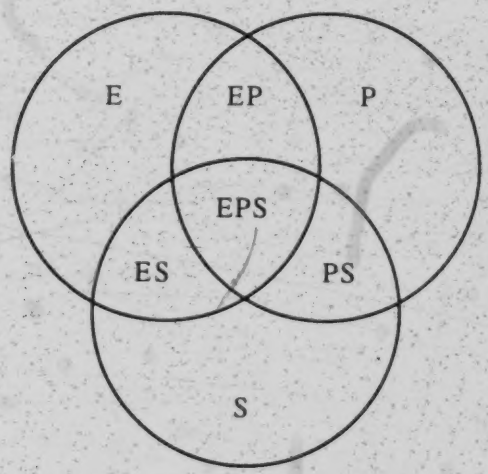
A third context of socialization emerged from the evidence that teaching is a people-oriented profession which, by necessity, involves networks of social relationships. This sociological context encompasses a variety of inter-personal relationships inherent in a beginning teacher's entry into the role of classroom teacher. As such, socialization to the social aspects of a teacher's role includes elements such as interaction with students and the social life of a teacher in the school and community.

The socialization of first year teachers within the ecological, psychological and sociological contexts formed a conceptual framework for the description of findings

which follow. Not surprisingly, a good deal of overlapping occurred in that some of the elements fell comfortably into two or three contexts and were described as dual or global elements respectively. Other elements were predominantly associated with one context of the socialization process and were accorded a more discrete assignment. The model in Figure 1 illustrates the different socialization contexts and describes their interconnectedness within this conceptual framework.

**Figure 1**

Conceptual Framework for Contexts of Socialization




**KEY:**

Predominant Context: E = Ecological P = Psychological S = Sociological

Dual Context: EP = Ecological - Psychological ES = Ecological - Sociological
PS = Psychological - Sociological

Global Context: EPS = Ecological - Psychological - Sociological

Each of the seven contextual areas depicted in Figure 1 will be elaborated upon in terms of the interview data which described the perceptions and experiences of the six beginning teachers who participated in the study. This interpretive approach

afforded opportunities for organization of the interview data and subsequent discussion. Of course, the assignment of elements to particular contexts involved the personal perceptions and decision-making on the part of the researcher. A degree of objectivity was achieved in this task through collaboration with an experienced classroom teacher from the school district who possessed a working knowledge of the schools, school personnel, communities, and both school and central administrations in question. In this way the eventual placement of the elements which emerged from the interview data resulted from thoughtful and knowledgeable collaboration and consensus of perception. The findings of the study are reported in seven sub-sections, each relating to a particular context within the conceptual framework.

## Findings of the Study

The perceptions and experiences of the selected first year teachers are presented and discussed in terms of socialization to the role of classroom teacher as follows:

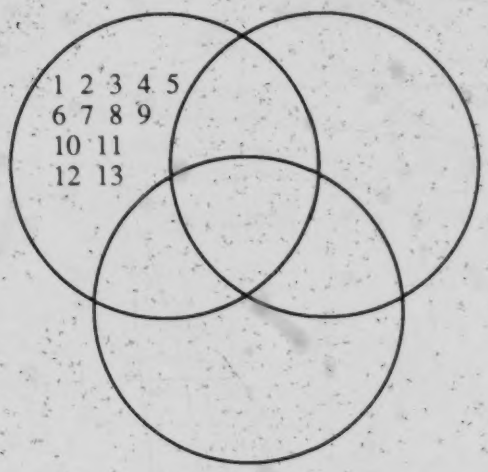
## Predominant Context — Ecological

A total of 13 elements drawn from the beginning teachers' perceptions and socialization experiences appeared as being predominantly related to the ecological context of teaching as shown in Figure 2. These elements for which socialization becomes largely a matter of personal adaptation, adoption, conformity, and the business of achieving a comfortable 'fit' fall within the ecological context of the school, system, and provincial organizations of the teaching profession.

All of the six first-year teachers entered the school district in possession of signed contracts. Their reasons for accepting offers of teaching positions in northern rural communities included: "I had been interviewed in other places but this was the first offer. I had student taught in both urban and rural areas and I wanted a rural placement"; "I didn't plan to end up here. I intended to get a job, a full-time teacher's job — anywhere," and; "It was my first job offer. I was broke. I was also familiar with the town and the community." Once assigned to their respective schools the beginning teachers faced the realities of their chosen profession. Their pre-service training at university was behind them and elements such as routinized procedures basic to a teacher's role had been largely predetermined. These were the elements within the ecological context of socialization which the teachers themselves raised in discussing the question of how newcomers are socialized to the impersonal or least personal aspects of teaching. Their personal experiences and perceptions provide some insights into this important area:

**Figure 2**

Socialization within the Ecological Context.




**KEY:**

1. Preservice preparation
2. Income from teaching
3. System orientation
4. System policies
5. School resources
6. School handbook
7. School goals and philosophy
8. School routines
9. Work load
10. Planning and organization
11. Curriculum content
12. School resources
13. Extra-curricular school activities

**Preservice preparation.** As recent graduates of teacher training programs at three universities in two provinces, the six beginning teachers bring current perceptions to the topic of preservice preparation, which is a fundamental component of the socialization process. In reality, preservice preparation is a highly directed experience in which trainees have few options regarding course selection and content, program sequencing, or practice-teaching assignments. The beginning teacher is in transition between the ecological context of university and the ecological context of the professional field. Interview data revealed that the participants had different

perceptions of course work and practicum components. All of the teachers referred to practice teaching in terms of the value of the practicum experience and/or the need to increase the time allocated to such first-hand experience in classrooms. The teachers' comments speak for themselves, as follows: "Practicums were the most useful part of university."; "The sharing of experiences from practicums, what has worked, has been helpful."; "They could throw you out there a little more [practice teaching]... if you could just spend more time with the kids."; "The practicum situation is changing now. The students have to go all year round to observe in classes, which is great."; and , "The experience of getting in front of the kids is what really prepares you." Such comments clearly illustrate support for the practice teaching component of preservice training.

The teachers also raised an area of teaching in which they felt a sense of inadequacy in their professional training. This area was described by one teacher as "the emotional or psychological side" of children. Another stated: "It [university] did not prepare me for the problems that would be encountered with kids — the reality of it. What it did not do was expose one to kids' abhorrent [sic] behaviour." In discussing the behaviour of children, yet another teacher observed, "This is the side you did not see in university. You didn't experience having to deal with each one of these kids."

Prerequisite training, which allowed these beginning teachers to take their places in the professional field, may or may not have been adequate to the practical needs of initial experience, but is what was perceived by others to have been in their best interests. This adds support to a position held by teacher educators that initial preservice preparation is only the beginning of life-long professional development.

**Salary.** The process of collective bargaining at the local level, and resultant salary grid, for the most part predetermines a practising teacher's remuneration. As a condition of service, salary was a positive element raised by the teachers. This positive perception may be linked to the fact that each had secured a teaching position as illustrated in one comment: "I am enjoying working and making money." and another succinct remark, "Well the pay cheque is one good thing, definitely." None of the teachers viewed salary negatively. Their unquestioning acceptance of the financial package adds weight to the placement of this element as an ecological given.

**Orientation.** A one day orientation session organized by the central office administration was viewed positively by all five of the first-year teachers who were able to attend. This activity held one day prior to the commencement of the school year introduced all new teachers to the central office personnel, provided an overview of the jurisdiction, addressed pertinent division policy, and assisted the new arrivals to complete necessary paper work. Positive perceptions of the orientation were revealed in statements such as: "You go there and you are meeting the big bosses and you are very nervous but the way everybody was so friendly it was good."; "If I had not been to that orientation I would still be filling in forms.", and; "By having an overview of all the division schools I felt better knowing that we are not just one school but a collective."

Despite the predetermined and mandatory nature of the orientation session it served the important functions of formally registering the newcomers in the bureaucratic structure of the school system , and acquainting them with organizational expectations. Therefore, the orientation represents an official introduction to fundamental aspects of the ecological context.

**System policies.** The development of policies is a cumulative process reflecting the changing needs, structures, and priorities of a school system. Policy-based management establishes sanctions, procedures, guidelines, regulations and precedent for organizational decision-making. A well organized but large policy handbook was rank ordered by the teachers as a low priority in terms of other elements which demanded their attention. The lower priority is indicated in comments such as, "I think it is a need to know basis, that's what I'm doing now. If something comes up and I need to know I will go flipping through it [ the handbook] " and "Even looking through that policy book is unreal. You cannot assimilate all the information — I would say it will take a couple of years."

The participants' perceptions demonstrate an acknowledgement of the importance and existence of this ecological component but also reveal healthy and common sense decisions as to its place in this complex, survival stage of teaching.

**Resources.** For inexperienced teachers, prescribed resources and materials represent basic survival tools. The conditions under which beginning teachers obtained such classroom resources and materials varied from school to school. For example, one teacher's experience with gathering text books was described:

> After I found out where they were — I had to ask — I had to get them from a storage room. I spent over an hour in the storage room trying to figure out how many kids, how many books — books that are totally wrecked and can't be used.

Another teacher stated: "I went and got the texts myself. I went searching for things.... I grabbed a teachers' guide for science myself — from the storage room." A

third teacher's position was more serious in that necessary resources were not available at all:

> I was supplied with a program of studies which offers many, many suggestions about possible learning activities. I am kind of hampered by not having any of the recommended text books so I cannot fall back on that very easily as I do not have the necessary information to give to my students.

Given the essential and prescribed nature of these resources it is alarming to see beginning teachers placed in such vulnerable positions. The lack of guidance and assistance in meeting this ecological requirement is further emphasized by the lack of comment that anyone in a position of authority or knowledge checked the neophytes' eventual choices of resources.

Three of the beginning teachers expressed satisfaction with the acquisition of necessary supplies, resources and materials for their respective classroom programs. This does little to allay the sense that newcomers require and deserve assistance and guidance in this key area.

**School handbooks.** - Locally-developed school handbooks provide school personnel, students, and parents with pertinent information about the day-to-day operation of the schools. Half of the beginning teachers stated that school handbooks were available to them, but three of the six participants appeared unaware of the existence of school handbooks. One young teacher commented:

> I would have a school handbook. I never thought to ask for one and don't know if there is one. It could set out supervision rules, general discipline policy, audio-visual material, art material — you know, like a travel guide.

This comment reflects the situational nature of beginning teachers' needs and concerns particularly when compared to the comments on the school system's policy handbook. The established operations of the school have an immediate ecological impact on the daily functioning of the classroom teacher. A handbook, in the absence of personal guidance, may well offer an important, compensatory resource.

**School goals and philosophy.** The school system has a universal mission statement and encourages each school to develop a local, compatible philosophy. The interview data revealed that formalized goals and philosophies were present in two schools, informal goals were featured in another and three teachers were unaware of these elements. Responses to questions relating to school goals and philosophies included: "I have no idea."; "At one point we were talking about making a mission statement for the school. I am not sure if the principal completed it and sent it off to the central office.", and; "The handbook contains the mission and philosophy." Participants generally indicated that school philosophy, mission and annual goals had not been developed, reviewed or emphasized in meetings of the whole school staff during the current year. This lack of focus on the philosophical or theoretical aspects of school operations suggests that beginning teachers are being socialized to the practical tasks of schooling.

**Routines.** Routines are determined at the school level in response to the character and traditions of individual communities. School routines addressed in the data included report cards, student attendance and procedures for parent-teacher interviews. The comments revealed very different experiences among the beginning teachers.

Reflections on experiences with report cards demonstrated the nature of the differences: "No one brought them [report cards] to me. I had to ask."; "For report cards it is fantastic as all we have to do as teachers is list one mark per student per course in the office and they do the rest using a computer.", and; "I have had to make up my own report cards. I've looked at what the teacher did in the past." Report cards are clearly an ecological given. However, how the beginning teachers were assisted in handling this important responsibility differed dramatically. As several were left to their own devices it raises the possibility that school administrators assume that reporting student progress is a skill that a beginning teacher has acquired in preservice training.

Student attendance policies are established at the local school level in response to provincial requirements. At some grade levels the registering of student attendance occurs several times a day. This routine task evoked comments like: "Kids gave me pointers too..., [on] how to take attendance."; "The office takes care of most of the work for registers", and; "I have to determine when there is a problem and act accordingly." Differences in the degree of responsibility expected of teachers in this matter is interesting. While all teachers performed the routine task of taking attendance differences were noted in how the information was processed. For example, one teacher's responsibility was limited to recording the names of absent students whereas another, with the same amount of teaching experience, was expected to not only make important decisions but to follow them through in terms of determining intervention procedures and punishments.

It is a system requirement that, on at least two occasions during the school year, all teachers will be prepared to meet personally the parents of their pupils in formally scheduled parent-teacher interviews. At some grade levels this requirement is extended to four interviews. Beginning teachers' experiences with established

procedures for parent-teacher interviews varied. For example, one teacher recalled: "Interviews, again I asked because I didn't know what was to happen. There had been a hint, like they said interviews would be in the gym.". Another had clear directives and stated, "I had no time slots [left empty]. We have bookings now of ten minutes and the parents showed up on time. It was good, it worked out well."

The differences in beginning teachers' experiences with routine tasks may be seen from two perspectives. One interpretation suggests an implicit assumption of school personnel that beginning teachers are trained to handle such routines. Another views newcomers as requiring direction and assistance in clarifying routine procedures.

**Work load.** In the ecological context, work load refers to the specific assignment which the principal has arranged for the teacher. Variations appeared in how well acquainted each of the newcomers was with expectations relating to work load. One teacher commented:

> Coming here and not knowing exactly what I would be teaching was a critical experience. I had had some contact and was aware of some of the units and books I would be using so I could work during the summer time.

Another teacher was well informed about the teaching assignment at the time of accepting the teaching position in the previous spring term. Despite the advantage of prior knowledge the teacher observed: "Again, as a first-year teacher I had nothing ready to go so probably the paper work and just preparing was the most crucial and time-consuming task." A third teacher possibly experienced greater concern relating to work load by "not being familiar with the subject areas on the level required" and

being placed in a position of having "a lack of resources and a lack of knowledge on how to obtain proper resources."

Work load might well be the most critical aspect of the ecological context in terms of the beginning teacher's survival in initial teaching experience and professional career. An administrator's overestimation of the newcomer's training and personal resources could have serious ramifications and implies that work load assignments should be based on thoughtful analysis of all relevant factors.

**Planning and organization.** A requirement for teachers to plan and organize appropriate tasks for students is basic to the institution of school. The school system required that classroom teachers develop long-range plans for submission to their principals, and maintain appropriately detailed daily plans. All of the beginning teachers noted the importance of being planned and organized, as revealed in their comments: "I never showed up at school without plans for the day. I'm always prepared."; "These were my first serious long range plans that had to be handed in [to the principal]. I had done a few practice ones in university. This was the real thing!"; "Long term plans are a little lacking but daily plans are prepared for the next day and I have reached a stage where unit plans are made."; "I was planning for the next day, looking at curriculum and planning guides because it was all new. I was spending time on my daily plans and had a month to do my long range plans. That was good."; "I think you get it [planning] down to a system. It does not take me as long to do my daily and weekly plans. In September the long term plans — getting them in on time — that was horrendous.", and finally; "Long term [plans] had to be in a month after school started.... The principal has a copy. They really help me for a time frame — I refer to them."

There appears to be a total acceptance, by beginning teachers and school administrators, of the ecological expectation that teachers are responsible for several levels of planning. Interestingly, these neophytes did not acknowledge any discrepancies between the expectations placed upon them and those placed upon experienced colleagues. It would seem reasonable, for example, that beginning teachers would be accorded either a great deal more time, or different procedures, to develop their first meaningful long-range plans.

**Curriculum content.** The Department of Education (Alberta Education), is responsible for developing, revising and disseminating subject area curricula and associated teacher guides and resources. The beginning teachers received and experienced curriculum content in different ways. One recalled, "When I signed the contract in June the Program of Studies was handed to me" and "I grabbed a teacher guide for science myself — from the storage room... I grabbed a math one too." Another admitted, "A program of studies I did not know existed. I got help from another teacher who dug out some books." A third teacher, when asked about teaching guides and manuals, responded, "Everything was on my shelf in the room and the outgoing principal pointed them out to me when she showed me around." Another explained, "They only had a certain number [of curriculum guides] for the teachers and didn't realize another teacher was going to be coming in.... I had to ask and that wasn't a problem."

Access to prescribed and current curriculum content is fundamental to any teacher. Beginning teachers who were not formally supplied with this material were placed in a difficult position. Any expectation that they were fully aware of these basic materials leaves to chance the very crucial area of program content. In early teaching

experience newcomers are concerned with what to teach and how to teach it. These curriculum materials provide clear guidelines for both.

**Organized inservice.** The school system has policies which delineate system-wide, school-based and conference attendance types of inservice, whereby every teacher is guaranteed a minimum of two organized inservice days annually. The teachers did not perceive organized inservice as either a high priority or major concern. They were generally pleased with inservice opportunities afforded to them at both the school and district levels. One teacher encapsulated the inservice experience by observing, "Those [inservices] are helpful in that I see what others are doing and it's, in a nutshell, information that I may be able to use in the future. It's extremely difficult integrating it into your first year." For another, the inservice experience was, "I have been on inservice already, for music.... I have been happy with what the system has had available to me." A third commented, "I went to a division inservice on social studies and it was just like a social studies methods course at university. It was all sort of a review where the key words were the same."

Perhaps the beginning teachers' focus on the practical aspects of teaching leads to lower priorizing of inservice experiences which tend to be theoretical and universal in nature. Ongoing, personal, developmental inservice may be more appropriate for first year teachers in these early months of teaching.

**Extra-curricular activities.** The school system's policy on Duties of Teachers defines a teacher's responsibilities as extending beyond the classroom and encourages teacher participation in extra-curricular activities with students.

Participation in extra-curricular activities was understandably varied due to the different age levels of students with whom the teachers worked. There was an acceptance of extra-curricular expectations for teachers. One teacher explained, "I also do a skipping club after school. I am in school until five o'clock most days." Another who coached volleyball noted, "I saw also that the school division was very keen on these extra-curricular activities. Even though we didn't break any records, like we lost most of our games, we had fun."

When the challenges for beginning teachers are taken into account it is commendable that such willing participation in extra-curricular activities occurs. It is possible that such participation reflects an appreciation for the advantages and enjoyment of interacting with students in settings other than the classroom.

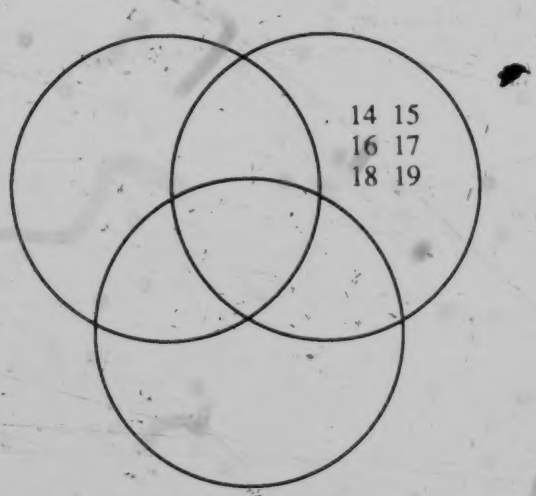
**Discussion — Ecological Context**

The findings relating to the ecological context of beginning teachers' socialization to their professional careers in the rural school system suggest that the present assumptions, attitudes and approaches toward socialization may be serving neither the new recruits nor the school system adequately. It is apparent that beginning teachers appreciate, need and seek assistance and orientation to the less personal and institutionalized aspects of a teaching position and are ready, in return, to invest their time and energies in the school. It behooves those in collegial and leadership roles to plan such assistance in an anticipatory and organized fashion. The first-year teachers' determination and willingness to learn from such opportunities, and to give of themselves, are supported in these perceptions and reflections.

**Predominant Context — Psychological**

**Figure 3**

Socialization within the Psychological Context




**KEY:**

14. transition from student to teacher
15. "sink or swim" approach
16. social isolation
17. stress from hours of work
18. successes
19. confidence

Beginning teachers enter membership of the school organization confronted by the realization that they will have responsibilities equal to the most senior of classroom teachers. Positive, negative and mixed feelings were products of this abruptness of entry into their chosen profession and provided a psychological context for examining the socialization of beginning teachers.

**Transition from student to teacher.** A consensus of opinion in the literature suggests that beginning teachers have experienced about 16 years of "apprenticeship

by observation" (Buchmann, 1987; Lortie, 1975). These experiences provide a general know-how for approaching the teaching role and are followed by "the shift from being a student on a university campus to being a beginning teacher in a public school classroom." (Corcoran, 1981, p. 19). When asked about their transition from university student to classroom teacher the participants in the study expressed various feelings. In relation to the first day with students, experiences were recalled as follows: "I did not know where to start. I was aware of what I had to teach but wondered where I could actually start."; "I thought that I would have been very insecure when they first came to my class but that wasn't the case. I wasn't too bad in front of those kids."; "Absolutely terrifying. It was compounded by the fact that I had two juveniles that have since gone to gaol.... I was very overwhelmed by the whole thing.", and; "The first [critical experience] was walking in on the first day and saying what do I do?".

These experiences in assuming the role of teacher are characterized by a great deal of uncertainty. It is possible that such feelings are unavoidable in the adoption of any new role. In teaching, however, there exists the need for the teacher to project an aura of competence, confidence, and individual authority in the critical first days. This could be compromised by an experienced colleague's well-intentioned intervention. Therefore, feelings of uncertainty may not be alleviated easily.

**"Sink or Swim" approach.** If the abruptness of entry cannot be alleviated a beginning teacher must cope immediately with the realities of a regular class load, a full curriculum content, and conditions inherent in the school setting. He or she will be expected to be comparable to more experienced colleagues. Examples of how these beginners internalized roles as teachers and expressed their feelings and rationales

are: "There has been a lot of trial and error."; "I guess I have to sink or swim and I'm doing my best to swim. I think I am doing that - so I do not wish to burden my administration with the program.", and:

> It becomes big and that is why you are flying by the seat of your pants sometimes. Like, okay, I have to do something here, this child is crying in my class and in practice teaching that was the time the co-operating teacher would take over — the crisis. But there is nobody to take over here, it is moving out on your own and no-one cleans up after you.

These beginning teachers appeared to accept without question that surviving entry into teaching would involve self-reliance rather than dependence on others. There is evidence here of risk-taking, experimentation, determination, and a growing awareness that teaching can be a solitary profession. They are being socialized to the private and solitary traditions of teaching.

**Social isolation.** When asked about feelings of isolation participants were generally positive, as demonstrated by the following statements: "I didn't feel isolated at all. Staff members are very supportive and were very co-operative."; "I feel accepted and like it here where the school is. My colleagues have done a lot, they are very friendly."; "I talk to friends who are first-year teachers elsewhere and they are all alone. I feel lucky as there is always someone for me to talk to... Some in other systems say they have no help, no direction.", and; "Isolation, no. I definitely feel out on my own, but in a way I enjoy that."

There is a difference between the professional isolation of a teacher in the classroom and feelings of social isolation within the school staff. The beginning

teachers' positive responses indicate feelings of belonging and beliefs that they are accepted, supported, and valued.

**Stress from hours of work.** The researcher discovered that all six participants experienced emotional stress as a result of the many extra hours they had to spend on school-related tasks. This was detected in comments such as: "Gosh, I work until eleven o'clock each night in an attempt to just keep ahead of the kids. I can't seem to get much further than that. I have a difficult time thinking beyond each unit and each subject area."; "For the first few months, I would get to school around seven-thirty in the morning and leave at seven at night. It was long hours. People were concerned I was going to burn out."; "I think I am putting in more time than most. There are weekends when I am here both days."; "I even get to the staff-room now, four days out of five. Before, they didn't see me until about December."; "You end up doing lots of stuff at the weekends.", and; "At times it fizzles you. At Christmas I was relieved that Christmas [break] was here." Participants also accepted and appreciated what they perceived as being a need to put in those extra hours. This can be seen in statements such as: "I wanted to be organized and ahead of the game so to speak. Students pick up on it if you are not organized."; "I think I am becoming more productive in that time."; "I realize in the first year that I have to put in the hours.", and; "If you do not do it you will not make it."

This commentary reflects the intangible spirit of teaching as revealed in the determination, sincerity, self-sacrifice, and intentionality of these beginners.

**Successes and growth in confidence.** Another positive aspect of the emotional experiences of these beginning teachers was that successes and growth in confidence seemed to accompany their time and effort. One of the participants had worked very hard with a student and described the situation and resultant feelings of satisfaction as follows:

> There is one boy I am proud of. He has been tested by a psychologist recently and found to have a real language disability. He would do nothing when asked. He would say "I can't" or "I won't." It is hard to give him the personal attention he needs. I had some real problems with him that I worked and worked on. He can't write his own stories so I reached a point where if he will dictate a story to me, I will write it down for him and then he must put it in his own printing. The first couple of times it was a real fight and yesterday he walked up to me and said, "(Teacher's name) will you write my story for me?" He was ready to sit down and work with me. I really felt good about that. He also wanted to stay in at recess and do his good copy. This is the boy who in other classes wanders the halls. I often have him up at my regular class peeking in to see what we are doing because he simply will not work. He is relating well with me.

For another, who admitted to being a "little nervous" when an assistant-superintendent or principal came to the classroom to observe, the experiences resulted in a positive feeling because, "The assistant-superintendent has been in two times now — he was really impressed." A third teacher experienced growing confidence as revealed in:

> Working together with them [students], I enjoy that. I think we have fun. At the interview I ask parents about that, what the parents are receiving at home — about the school — and they seem to say that overall the kids are enjoying it. That was a positive experience for me.

This same teacher stated: "After my first week I remember saying that I still felt like a student teacher. I don't even think about that anymore. Now I feel more in charge." For others satisfaction was expressed as: "Kids, I can help them and it is a

pleasure." and "I am more confident now." A final example of positive feelings came from a teacher discussing the students:

> Most are looking to the future and deciding themselves - that they need their education and need the advanced level. I bring across time and again that what they do today affects tomorrow. I am happy with them — these young adults.

These elements of success and confidence reveal developing senses of identity and self-concept, as well as a growing store of practical knowledge that accords them feelings of being competent professionals.

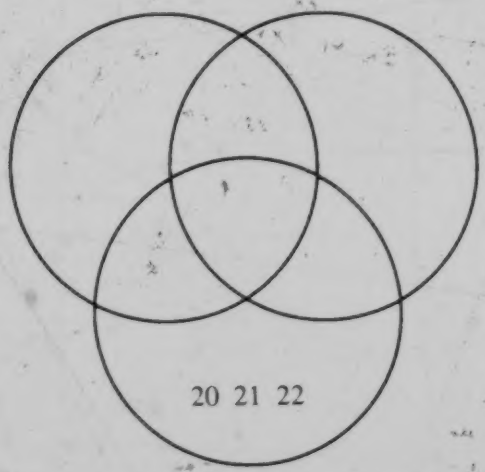
**Discussion — Psychological Context**

Beginning teachers' perceptions provide insights into the difference between "doing teaching" and growing into the role of teacher. Participants in the study demonstrated a development of practical knowledge, learning through experience and the formulation of their individual beliefs about teaching. Tension, satisfaction, pride, confidence and concern were predominantly derived from personal relationships with students. A need to nurture this psychological growth may prove most valuable to administrators. These beginning teachers are representative of professionals whose intentionality is very good. They possess a genuine interest in the students and a desire not to "burden" their administrators. Each beginning teacher also projects that he or she is very much a part of the socialization process by accepting a great deal of the responsibility that accompanies the role of teacher and learner.

**Predominant Context - Sociological**

**Figure 4.**

Socialization within the Sociological Context.




**KEY:**

20. classroom inter-personal relationships
21. co-operation of students
22. social life - school and community

**Classroom inter-personal relationships.** To be an effective member of the school organization a teacher cannot avoid the inter-personal or people oriented nature of his or her profession. One teacher recalled an attempt to establish a positive inter-personal classroom environment in the following way: "The first thing that I did was tell them [the students] where I was from, what I did for the last couple of years, and how come I was here." Another emphasized the importance of an appropriate social environment by stating, "the kids and I know where the line is drawn. We know what is acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour." A third shared very positive views of inter-personal relationships in commenting: "Of course I have a wonderful bunch of students. They are great." Not all social relationships were described in positive

terms. For example, one teacher recounted: "I only have one student who is physically and verbally attacking others."

Clearly the inter-personal relationships within a classroom involve more than the intentionality of the teacher. These beginning teachers appear to realize they have a pro-active role in developing healthy social environments.

**Co-operation of students.** As noted previously, a beginning teacher stated that students gave pointers on how to keep the daily attendance register. Co-operation from students relates to the sociological context within which a beginning teacher must function. Such co-operation was demonstrated in one teacher's description of the students as: "They seemed to respect the fact that I was in charge and that they were here to learn." A less positive observation of student co-operation was noted in: "They are not stepping out and helping you try to teach them. Rather they are sitting back saying 'teach me'." Another teacher sought outside assistance to help deal with a problem student and commented: "I am to meet soon with a school counsellor to see what we can do to change this student's behaviour."

These young teachers suggest by their comments that they perceive teaching and learning as an interactive process, and that the classroom enterprise is facilitated by positive inter-personal and co-operative relationships. Further to that is a sense that co-operative relationships are cultivated rather than given.

**Social life.** Questions about social life prompted positive responses from all six participants. These included: "I was born here and there are many people who knew my parents. This has been positive."; "People are very friendly. If you want to

have friends there are many to be found."; "They [staff] have been very good. Personally, on a personal level they have been wonderful and we are all friends.", and; "In this school there are social activities. For example, around Christmas time there are parties, going caroling and hay rides." Examples of less positive inter-relationships were: "She [a teacher] wasn't rude or anything, she was more or less ignoring me."; "Even though on your business level you have your problems we have kept a friendship.... There is one colleague who is probably not unwilling to help but doesn't appear to want to take the time.", and; "The staff, well there will always be some you do not feel you can approach and some you do approach and think you won't again."

It is interesting to note the heavy focus on school in response to questions about social life. This tends to indicate that rural first year teachers perceive the school as a primary vehicle of social activities and social acceptance.

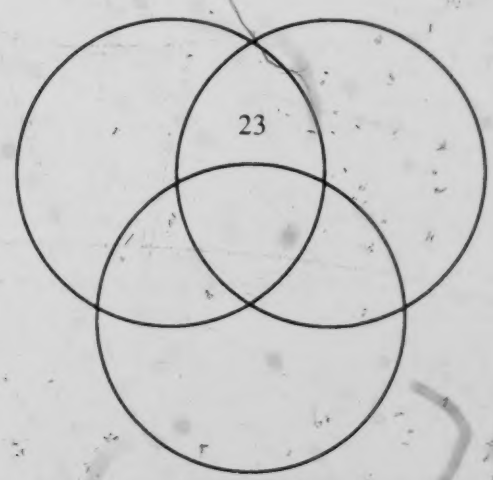
**Discussion — Sociological Context**

Socialization within the inter-personal or sociological context subsumes those helping relationships and social realities which are integral parts of the teaching environment. The observations of these rural beginning teachers pointed to students, colleagues, and the community of the school rather than the community at large as playing key roles in the socialization process.

**Dual Context - Ecological - Psychological**

**Figure 5**

Socialization within the Ecological - Psychological Context




**KEY:**

23. information overload

**Information overload.** Information overload has been assigned to a dual context. It is initiated in the ecological realm, the source of the information, and is psychological because of its emotional effects. Beginning teachers received information packages and verbal input at the system and school levels. One participant referred to "more paper," meaning written information and directives. Feelings of anguish and frustration as a direct result from what was perceived as information overload appeared a number of times in the interview data. Statements that reflected this context were: "It was like information overload at the beginning. Things were coming in and you are trying to process but you haven't experienced it yet"; "I guess the first thing that came up was the overwhelming nature of the information, to be able to assimilate and deal with on a daily basis - information

overload."; "I would say it would help if we [beginning teachers] were not given too much at one time. We are bombarded from all sides."; and, "But that is part of the paper work I did not get through yet."

**Discussion — Ecological-Psychological Context**

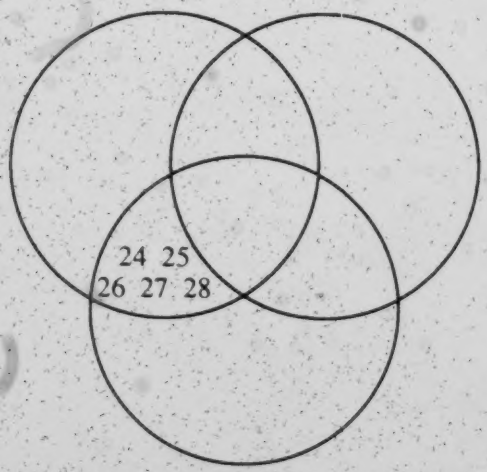
The timing of the new teachers' arrival, coinciding as it does with the busiest time of year for all staff, all but precludes the possibility of getting help to assimilate, or make sense of, the information. The beginning teacher's advice regarding the distribution of information is well-intended, but raises a question of whether or not information overload is avoidable. The reality that much of the print information involves curriculum content, guides, procedures, organizational matters, and local school agendas — all intended to help the beginning teacher to get a foothold — makes imprudent the withholding of information. One appropriate alternative might include hiring beginning teachers in the preceding spring term in order to provide them with information at an earlier date. Another approach might involve meetings among beginning teachers, administrators and experienced staff members to acquaint newcomers with necessary information in other than print form. The sad fact of entering teaching is that a great deal of organizational information has to be digested and applied in a relatively short period of time.

**Dual Context - Ecological-Sociological**

Elements assigned to this context have their origins in the less personal ecological realm and apply to a sociological or inter-personal aspect of a teacher's role.

**Figure 6**

Socialization within the Ecological - Sociological Context




**KEY:**

24. playground supervision
25. relationship with colleagues
26. relationships with students
27. communication with parents
28. parent-teacher interviews

**Playground supervision.** Playground supervision fits this dual context as it is a teacher task mandated at the school by policy or administrative decision, and is a task that demands inter-personal contact. Initial supervision of students outside the classroom was experienced by one participant as follows:

> I was on supervision too, and got out there right away, and everyone saw the new teacher.... I had some students leave the tennis courts and then there was some yelling and things sort of got obscene. So I couldn't let it go. I pulled them over and the principal was doing his rounds so I had him deal with it. I mainly walked around but I was concerned with where do you draw the line.

Another teacher described similar early experiences with supervision of students outside the classroom as:

> With supervision I found there were no rules — nobody came to me and said these are the supervision rules. I would come in from supervision each day saying that they did this and I don't think that is quite safe and "How do you guys handle it?" That is how I came to know about playground supervision.

Unlike the perceived problems of information overload, these beginning teachers' experiences with their first attempts at playground supervision highlighted the problems caused by a lack of information and direction. This aspect of the ecological-sociological context is an area of socialization in which beginning teachers can be very vulnerable, as they are dealing with larger numbers of students in a less structured setting. Being forced to "sink or swim" as a playground supervisor may not be to the benefit of the school, the students, or the beginning teacher.

**Relationships with colleagues.** The allocation of staff to a school and the mandating of monthly staff meetings are less personal, or ecological, in nature. However, the need for staff to be and work together makes the element interpersonal, or sociological, as well. All six participants expressed that they related better to some staff members than others. An experience worth noting was recalled by one participant:

> Well, I don't really know the ----[grade level] end of the school. I am more familiar with the ---- wing of the building. At one of the skipping classes I saw a lady join in and assumed she was a parent. When I told her I was a teacher at the school she said "So am I." So some of the faces I know but I don't know the people well. I might just say hello to them on the street, whereas this end, we get together.

This comment, made at mid-year, suggests that the development of personal relationships with all members of staff, even in rural communities, cannot be taken for granted. Also revealed here is the tendency toward professional isolation in that teachers appear to compartmentalize, by choice, into groups sharing mutual interests

such as grade level. Four of the teachers spoke favourably about their relationships with school secretarial staff.

**Relationships with students.** The administrative allocation of students to teachers and teachers to students, and the assignment of classrooms, places the beginning teacher in a position of developing effective social systems within prescribed settings. Relationships with students featured prominently in experiences raised by the teachers during the course of the study. One participant's view of student-teacher relationships was, "Be prepared, have assignments ready and corrected, after all, students hand work in and they expect it to be corrected as soon as possible." This teacher aimed "to be approachable and available to students as many are shy and don't want to approach you during class but are more than willing to come in at noon or after school or in between classes." For another beginning teacher, developing relationships with students was a more difficult task:

> At the beginning of the year I was over stimulated, I was constantly on edge [with students]. I did not know what I was supposed to let go and the kids were not sure how they were supposed to act with me. It was easy for me to get tied up in a knot for no apparent reason but as time goes by you are able to identify what you can and cannot do.... What is happening with my students is [that] the relationship I have with the majority of them is that of friend or equal.

The different values and inter-personal styles of teachers are evident in these remarks. One has placed a high value on hard work, responsibility and fairness, tempered by empathy and trust. The other valued relationships at a more personal level - to be a friend to the students. The development of individual inter-personal styles can be viewed positively, as it offsets the potentially impersonal nature of the institutional environment.

**Communication with parents / Parent - teacher interviews.** These two elements are combined because they were either synonymous or complementary in the interview data. Two participants indicated limited utilization of telephone calls, newsletters and after-school meetings in teacher-parent communication. The others found that the formal parent-teacher interview sessions were the only means of sharing and communicating with parents. Such formal interviews represent a district policy and are therefore, ecological in nature. The sociological context is reflected in the teacher and parent engagement in an interactive situation. The beginning teachers' experiences varied. One participant described a parent-teacher incident as:

> I can remember one where I had hit a kid, just on the shoulder, and I guess it pinched the boy's nerve. I did not want to hurt him. His father came to the interview and said, "I don't like hearing that you are beating up my kid".... Anyway, we had a discussion which included the fact that his son was not putting in the effort. We came up with solutions — I was to phone home so that the father could follow up and make sure that the boy did his work.

A second teacher found parent-teacher interviews "a breeze" and related, "I have heard that the parents are really happy, there are no problems. They come in and say, "Hi, how's my child doing?" and you tell them how they are doing and they are happy and walk out."

Communication with parents is more strongly influenced by the students' ages and the traditional attitudes held within the community, than by the beginning teacher's intentionality.

The study indicated that the formally scheduled parent-teacher interview most often represented the primary vehicle for communication between teacher and parents. This implies that beginning teachers relied on the routinized procedures dictated by the ecological context. Although effective, ongoing communication with parents is

encouraged as an important strategy, it would appear that these beginning teachers are being socialized toward traditional home/school roles.

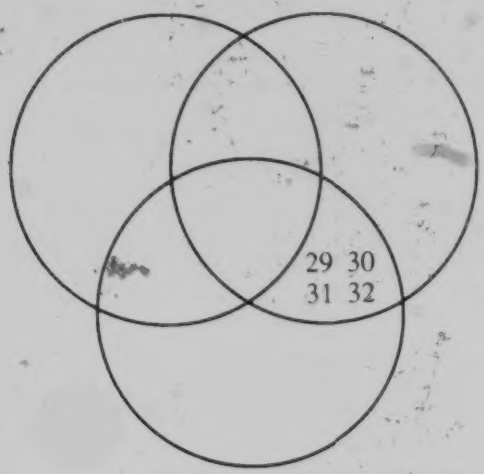
**Discussion — Ecological-Sociological Context**

Interpersonal contact and relationships are basic to an organization such as school. The new teachers were faced with learning how to relate to various stakeholders within the institution and in their roles as 'the teacher' through a variety of formal and informal means. If administrators are aware of the important skills subsumed in the creation of a positive ecological-sociological climate they can offer first-year teachers valuable assistance in the socialization process. Such assistance might take the form of written guidelines for parent-teacher interview planning, modelling effective parent-teacher conference strategies, facilitating home-school communication and providing recommendations relating to conducive teacher-student interaction in the school.

**Dual Context - Psychological - Sociological**

**Figure 7**

Socialization within the Psychological - Sociological Context




**KEY:**

29. assistance from colleagues
30. motivation of students
31. attitudes of parents
32. relocation

The psychological - sociological context of teaching includes elements that focus on inter-personal relationships and how the new teacher is emotionally affected by such interactions in the socialization process. The context was accorded four elements of socialization as shown in Figure 7.

**Assistance from colleagues**. This element differs from relationships with colleagues in that good relationships may exist without any offer or provision of assistance to the beginning teacher. All six of the beginning teachers commented on how much they valued and appreciated the assistance offered to them by experienced

colleagues. Their respective observations included: "A colleague, a fellow teacher — she has given the most help."; "On a daily basis it is my colleagues who give help."; "The staff has been great, coming around and checking up on me, to see how I am doing and seeing if there was any way they could be of help."; "If I was by myself I would not be able to make it. The help and backing in them [colleagues] saying you are not worse than anybody else — that they have had the same experiences."; "Fellow teachers have given me ideas on how to deliver different objectives.... It's moral support.... They are a pretty professional lot."; and, "From the teacher I succeeded I received a lot of support in what to do and the time schedule. I got a lot of books and help from her."

These findings strongly support Odell's (1984) research conclusions that fellow teachers give more support and assistance to beginning teachers than do other school personnel. An interesting finding was that not one of the six beginning teachers involved in the study had a buddy, or mentor, officially assigned at the school. When asked about the idea of having an assigned mentor one participant responded: "I think so, yes, because it wouldn't feel like an imposition [by the beginner]."

The assistance offered to the beginning teachers by school-based administration was raised as a valued source of support as noted in the following perceptions: "And that is quite nice to know — that there is principal support and backing."; "They [administrators] have been able to give me advice on my activities and whether or not I am meeting what the program requires of me."; "Whenever I have something to say such as if something happened in my class I don't have any problems walking into the principal's office, shutting the door and telling him.", and; "I have found a lot of times the discipline in the school is not supported by the administration." In one instance, the beginning teacher and an experienced teacher initiated a process whereby all teachers new to the school could meet with the school

administration, "to ask all our questions and it didn't take all the staff meeting time with all the rest of the staff. We covered expectations for both the students and the teachers."

Beginning teachers, for the most part, seek a different kind of support from school administrators than is sought from classroom teachers. The level of support involves trouble shooting, supervisory commentary, and feedback, as well as affirmation that they are accepted as teachers. It appears that these first year teachers recognized their limitations, and one can only speculate on their sense of vulnerability if perceived appropriate support is not forthcoming.

**Motivation of students.** Motivating students to attend well to school work entails interpersonal relationships as well as personal beliefs, values and mental processes for the beginning teacher. When asked about motivation of students the teachers' opinions ranged from very positive to negative. For example, one saw the students as "very good. I am really impressed with them — they are very friendly and want to learn.". Another expressed similar feelings in "They know they are here to work." One found the class to be less typical as revealed by the comment: "The girls certainly do not like to speak in public or look at you. That was a challenge to set up so they were able to express themselves in a non-threatening fashion and it's still kind of out there." Another participant observed: "The majority are hard to motivate."

It would appear that differences in levels of student motivation might reflect influences of grade level, student perceptions of their ability to succeed, gender, and, in the present study, cultural differences and community attitudes. The comments reveal

a valuing of motivation, as a sound teaching strategy and a powerful influence on learning.

**Attitudes of parents.** Parental attitudes toward education, teachers and the local school are formed prior to the new teacher's assignment to the school staff. The beginning teacher internalizes some understanding of these parental attitudes in the course of experience. One newcomer found the parents' attitudes to be supportive and explained: "Generally, they [parents] are concerned about their children's education. I had one parent only that I would describe as overly protective." The converse was true for another beginning teacher in a different community who noted that parents were not attending the parent-teacher interviews even when asked to do so through telephone calls and written requests. In the teacher's words: "It could be the attitude of the community or maybe the school is seen as something to be nervous about and needs a little more boosting or something."

The real socialization experience here, indicates a personal awareness that the considerable efforts and good intentions directed toward students' well being may not always be openly appreciated by parents. Given the data on the excessive time and effort expended by these beginning teachers on their teaching responsibilities, it would appear that apathetic parental attitudes have not dampened, as yet, the teachers' enthusiasm. The long term picture is less clear, but the teachers' pro-active stance of seeking solutions to the problem appears positive.

**Relocation.** It is commonly expected that beginning teachers will have to relocate in order to commence their teaching careers. The psychological and sociological aspects of relocation were highlighted in the interesting observations of one beginning teacher who had moved six hundred kilometers from home:

> Well for me it was my first time living on my own. I had to contend with laundry, dishes, post-office, getting the telephone set up. You know, all the little things like that. There was changing of addresses, writing to friends saying, "I am up here now". I found out on the Friday and was up here on the following Monday. Banking was new and so was moving all my furniture which was a hassle, getting someone at such short notice. And in my first year of teaching too. Wow! My furniture arrived on the second, I think it was. I really did not have any problems.

The experience of relocation experienced here is indicative of feelings of adventure, excitement, and entering the adult world of self-reliance and independence. Five of the six participants experienced relocation but generally found the process to be less stressful than anticipated, and accepted the responsibility without complaint.

## Discussion — Psychological-Sociological Context

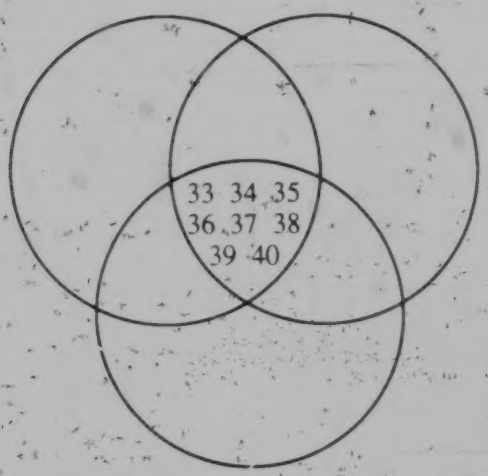
The beginning teachers were unanimous in believing that assistance from colleagues, including school-based administrators, was indispensable to their psychological well-being and social survival in teaching. Administrators who are in central positions of shaping and influencing schools' social and psychological climates might consider the impact of collegial assistance and the confidence, moral support, backing and feedback sought by newcomers to the profession. In addition, the data revealed some of the young teachers' beliefs and values in education as found in their motivation of students and observations of parent attitudes towards school. An

interesting finding concerned the beginners' acceptance of the personal dislocation of moving to small rural towns and villages in order to secure a teaching position. Perhaps the relative ease with which they relocated, and assumed responsibility for new lives in apartment and trailer living, is indicative of these first-year teachers' determination and desire to succeed in their chosen careers. In all of these findings, it cannot be overlooked that the personal and professional lives of new teachers are subject to a good deal of public scrutiny and evaluation by resident educational stakeholders in small communities. This reality of rural teaching emphasizes the importance of beginning teachers either sensing, or quickly developing, a comfort zone of positive interpersonal relationships and psychological support within the school staff.

Global Context - Ecological-Psychological-Sociological

**Figure 8**

Socialization within the Global Context




**KEY:**

| | |
|---|---|
| 33. classroom management | 34. role as a teacher |
| 35. student differences | 36. evaluation of students |
| 37. time spent on work | 38. practice teaching |
| 39. central office administrators' role | 40. school principals' role |

Each of the listed elements contained aspects relating to all three major contexts and were assigned as global elements.

**Classroom management.** This global element is an ecological requirement of the school district and the school, is an emotional or psychological process for the teacher, and is implemented in a sociological or interpersonal setting. Five of the beginning teachers placed classroom management as their number one priority

regarding the role of a teacher, which in turn places emphasis on classroom management as being a crucial area of the socialization process. The teachers offered important insights into their perceptions and experiences in such comments as:

> Classroom management is the most important [priority]. You have to have a hold on that first and then you can organize the material. If they are not listening to you the organization goes out the window. The students won't approach you on anything if there is no classroom management.

> I had not spent much time with kids. When at university you don't spend that much time with them. Even when you are on student teaching, student behaviour is pretty well cushioned by the co-operating teacher. And tied with discipline is being able to distinguish between behaviour by students that is a result of them feeling good and behaviour that is "off the wall".

> There was no discipline policy in the school at all. Because of that I did not know what to do for certain things and it got to the point where the kids knew the teachers were not consistent. The principal took all the children in for a movie while the rest of the teachers sat down for the afternoon and came up with a discipline policy.... I would say that discipline is the most critical of my experiences.

> I am not much older than some of my students so I have to develop my personality as a teacher and be strict and firm so they take me seriously.

The data indicate that beginning teachers have expectations of what student behaviour should be. For one, appropriate behaviour is prerequisite to student learning. Another sees it as something to be learned on the job. A third views the establishment of guidelines to be external to the classroom, and a fourth believes classroom management results from an extension of the teacher's personality. All appreciated the importance of this element and believed they had some sense of responsibility and control in establishing a personally satisfying management climate within their classrooms.

**Role of the teacher.** This element was perceived as subsuming ecological considerations of the institutional functions which teachers fulfill; psychological aspects in the developing beliefs, knowledge, values, and sense of identity as teacher; and sociological factors involving the interpersonal relations within a complex social environment. The role of the teacher was addressed by all of the beginning teachers in a variety of ways. One teacher commented:

> The perception that I have about we the teachers is something like we are supermen. We have to teach them, we have to take care of them, we have to understand them, we have to educate them, we have to raise them. We are not only teachers, we are educators — educators more on the social part and teaching more academically speaking.

Another stated:

> I have to draw on my memory from my own schooling for some subjects. I guess my biggest challenge is to educate myself in a given topic in a subject and make an attempt to make that interesting and relevant to my students on a daily basis.

A third teacher believed:

> I like the students to enjoy, I don't want it [learning] to be a dread. I don't mean entertain, although sometimes it is entertaining. They are accustomed to that. To make it a positive place where they want to learn. If you can teach them how to learn and to enjoy it then I think that is important. Curriculum-wise, I want to cover the course.

The differences in the perception of the role of teacher could reflect influences of school setting, school climate, grade level, and beginning teachers' personal beliefs about teaching. Socialization in this respect results from interaction between each teacher's personal resources and the realities of the school. Whereas one beginning teacher emphasized the developmental and holistic view of children's education, others ascribed a teacher's role as being mainly concerned with acquiring and imparting subject knowledge in interesting and enjoyable ways.

**Student differences.** Differences among students was considered a global element because the school and system expect a teacher to cater to individual needs and differences, inter-personal skills are required, and the attitudes, feelings and knowledge of the first year teachers come into play. Participants, when asked about such differences, responded as follows:

> I also received assistance from the guidance counsellor. I've become friends with her and she helps in how to deal with certain students, especially with that one behaviour problem. We have had a lot of contact in between for this child. And that is what I found, all the education learning you can have and still you have to handle each one differently — so I am learning. Although sometimes I think that there must be someone somewhere who can tell me how to deal with this child. You learn and I guess that is one thing I am realizing.

> You always have your pretty smart ones. In this room the boys seem to be strong, academically except for one. But in the girls there is only one who stands out as being smart. There is the type where they are very friendly. There are shy ones. I have one with an attention deficit.

> You have to be fully in contact with the group if you want to get them to learn something and if my stuff is more important than their stuff then I think I am going wrong somewhere. I would rather not go too far ahead. You have to consider the students. You have to start from where they are.... I was able to pick them up — the students who have problems.

> What hit me more as a beginner was all the organization and the emotional side, the emotional dealings with these kids as individuals; not only the education but also counselling them when they break down and start crying in your class. It is probably like being a parent - all the little things. It must be like parenting skills, you are forced to handle their problems.

Evident in the data is the beginning teachers' recognition that individual student differences exist, and that deliberate attempts are made to cope with such differences in positive ways. These newcomers show an awareness that this is part

of being a teacher, and a willingness to develop insights and strategies as well as access appropriate assistance in dealing with student differences. Perhaps the subjective nature of individual differences precludes the possibility of developing effective strategies in any way other than through the lived experience of the practising teacher.

**Evaluation of students.** Evaluating student progress is an organizational requirement which involves inter-personal relationships and mental processes like analysis and subjective judgements. Beginning teachers recounted different experiences with this global context:

> I did it through a check list and daily observations and tests. It depends, for mathematics it is more objective. For language you have to listen to their reading, watch their printing and now it is sentence formation and they form words. You know, are they participating? Do you have some idea of what is happening? It is mainly through check lists.

For this teacher, evaluation of student progress means more than an objective appraisal of cognitive performance. The ongoing nature of evaluation suggests that it has a larger purpose than reporting student achievement. Another beginning teacher's experiences with student evaluation appeared less positive:

> One thing I didn't realize was how I had been marking for the report card so I asked the secretary if she thought I was marking easy or hard and she figures I have been marking fairly easy and I thought I was working hard. I found out that I was not aware of what the division had as a mark for an A or a B. I give comments and a letter grade.

Apparently no expectations and procedures were shared with this beginner, who appeared to be adopting a trial and error approach to arrive at appropriate evaluation

strategies. The newcomer's choice of advisor (the secretary) in this important professional area is interesting.

The majority of the interviewees tended to regard evaluation of student progress in a narrow sense of testing to gain marks for reporting purposes. It is possible that such perceptions reflected, or were influenced by, the pervasive evaluation values and beliefs in the respective schools or system policies.

**Time spent on school work.** Teachers' formal schedules do not support the extensive and mandatory preparation, planning, and marking which are fundamental to the daily work of a teacher. This places the beginning teacher in the position of allocating considerable time after hours to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills which can only be gained through practice. The spending of this time has implications on how these new teachers conduct their social lives. The interview data revealed a general acceptance, commitment, and sense of need to devote inordinate amounts of time to their work during the early months of experience. One beginning teacher captured the essence of the interviewees' perceptions of time spent on school work, as:

> It was a necessary step and I guess it paid off now. Half of my program is what I created and I had a lot of energy at the beginning. I feel if I hadn't worked so hard at the beginning I would not be doing as well as I could. Now I am running out of a bit of steam but half or three quarters of my work is done. So I can enjoy life now - take it a bit easier.

**Practice teaching.** Although practice teaching was introduced in the ecological context as an aspect of preservice preparation, this element is accorded particular focus in the global context. Practice teaching is a mandatory activity, deals

with inter-personal relationships, and places the individual in the position of developing knowledge, beliefs and values about the role of a teacher. It might be termed as the initial, formal introduction to the socialization process. Participants in the study spoke highly of the practical experience and the opportunity to work with co-operating teachers in the field. They also noted the limitations and partial reality inherent in the practicum. They described practice teaching as follows:

> In my practice I had a co-operating teacher who would step back and let me be in charge. But it was different in the sense of the big project. She would take over if there were big problems with the kids. That is the side you did not see in university. You didn't experience having to deal with each one of these kids.
>
> What it did not do was expose one to kids' abhorrent [sic] behaviour — the weird stuff they do that doesn't make any sense. You are given the best of the best in the practical experience or at least I certainly was. It did not prepare me for the problems that would be encountered with kids — the reality of it. So it is no one's fault, that is just the way it is. They cannot put you out in the schools all the time and unfortunately that is what you have when you are teaching. You have your own reality here. They are two different things.
>
> Practicums were the most useful part of university I would say. There are some courses that I took that I will probably never use and I would rather have had more time in the classroom. The experience of getting in front of the kids is what really prepares you. I mean you need your curriculum instruction courses as you need to know what is expected of you in those areas but I think practicum time is your most important.

There is a consensus that practice teaching is an important, even essential, part of teacher preparation. There is also an awareness that the realities of being in one's own classroom cannot be simulated fully in the practicum experience. The interview data lend support to the major issues surrounding relevant teacher training

programs which are currently being debated by teacher educators in many parts of the world.

**Central office.** The role of central office in the socialization process involves organizational management, social hierarchical relationships, and a felt sense of being judged for professional worthiness on the part of the beginning teacher. One beginning teacher's comments illustrated the global nature of the central office role by explaining:

> The way I see central office is a group of people who are controlling the schools but they don't dip in to get the feeling, to get the pace of what is going on there. They are a little detached, busy with other things. They are seen as being the bosses and have a say in your hiring and firing. So a new teacher can see that as threatening. The first time Mr ___ came to my class, for the first ten or fifteen minutes I was stressed because of him, not the students.

Another shared more positive perceptions by stating: "The assistant-superintendent has come in to do two observations and has been able to offer some very concrete and objective suggestions on how to make things better."

The commentary above demonstrates the pervasive influence of central office personnel on the socialization experiences of beginning teachers in rural placements.

**The role of school principals.** Although similar to the role of central office personnel, principals are in the position of having more immediate and continuous influence on the socialization experiences of beginning teachers. The newcomers in this study appreciated and sought the involvement of school-based administrators. Their perceptions of the principal's role included: "I would say support from your

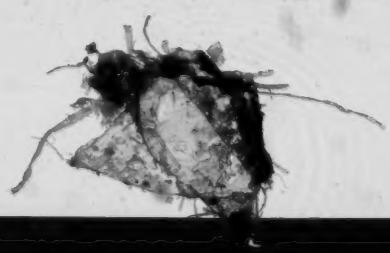
principal is very important, especially in discipline. I feel very strongly about that."; "The principal said if you have any problems [discipline] send them to me. And that is quite good to know, that there is principal support and backing."; and, "If I had any concerns or questions the principal was willing to sit down and talk about them." The importance of having the principal's support and encouragement is highlighted in the following:

> Maybe it is personal but I like to know there is someone behind me and it doesn't have to be someone in the classroom with me. It just has to be someone to give me feedback, or to ask me - just a little contact to plug you back with what you just did and it gets you going.

This concluding comment is fitting. Throughout the data these beginning teachers have shared their efforts to learn, and their willingness to take risks, experiment and benefit from experience as they acquire the professional skills and knowledge to function as competent and effective teachers. The role of the school principal raises connotations of a safety net for teachers in these exploratory, early stages of their careers.

**Discussion — Ecological-Psychological-Sociological Context**

It is interesting that several of the elements of the global context coincide with research findings of major concerns and problems faced by beginning teachers. For example, Veenman (1984) concluded from his synthesis of research in several countries, that classroom management and dealing with student differences ranked first and third respectively among problem areas faced by beginning teachers. Perhaps the multi-contextual nature of these global elements, and their attendant complexity of interactions, help to explain the expectations and pressures placed on first year



teachers. From my own experience in school and system administration I contend that the global elements of classroom management (discipline), dealing with student differences, and evaluating student progress feature prominently as gauges of beginning teachers' competence and effectiveness.

The socialization of beginning teachers appears to be an individual and developmental process influenced considerably by factors such as school setting, administrative support, differences among students, school climate, and the personal beliefs, knowledge and values of first year teachers. There seem to be, however, common elements that either assist or impede the process of newcomers developing a sense of identification with the role of teacher. The interview data of this small number of teachers employed in a relatively small school system, revealed that the major responsibility for socialization rested with the local school and with the beginning teacher. It was noted that central office personnel initiated the process prior to the commencement of teaching duties and , thereafter focussed mainly on evaluating the newcomers' effectiveness as employees. After central office personnel's initial contribution the process of socialization appears to fall squarely on the local school. Overall, it would appear that the schools in this study had neither clarified nor developed consistent procedures by which first year teachers could be formally assisted in becoming effective members of their respective staffs.

Several conclusions have been drawn from this data. They are presented and discussed, along with their implications for stakeholders, in Chapter Five.

## Chapter 5

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### Introduction

This chapter consists of four major sections. The first section summarizes the purpose of the study and reviews the research methodology. Contextual themes, which emerged from the interview data, are presented in the second section. The third section is a discussion of conclusions and implications drawn from the findings. The final section presents implications for further research in relation to the socialization of beginning teachers.

### Summary

**Purpose of the study.** The purpose of the study was to explore the socialization experiences of beginning teachers in order to examine how newcomers perceived the conditions under which they learned to be practising teachers. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do beginning teachers learn about the philosophy, mission, values and norms of the school and the expectations placed on teachers?
2. What critical experiences did beginning teachers encounter in the classroom and in the school?
3. What were the positive and negative outcomes of these experiences?
4. What assistance and guidance did beginning teachers receive from school-based administrators and colleagues?
5. What implications for school-based administrators can be drawn from beginning teachers' perceptions of their socialization experiences?

**Research methodology.** The research methodology was designed to acquire beginning teachers' perceptions of their initial teaching experiences and some understanding of the positive and negative aspects of the socialization process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six beginning teachers from elementary, junior high, senior high, and special education classrooms in five schools within one rural school district in northern Alberta. The holding of personal, semi-structured interviews facilitated free-flowing conversation that allowed the participants to describe memorable experiences in a non-threatening fashion. The effectiveness of the interview method was assisted by hand-delivery of the specific research questions several days prior to the interview. Journal notations, field notes and interview transcripts comprised the data files.

**Contextual themes.** Forty elements of interview data were categorized under 12 general headings from which emerged three major contexts described as ecological, psychological, and sociological. The ecological context is relatively impersonal and involves the conditions, expectations, and constraints implicit in institutional organizations like schools. The psychological, or intra-personal, context addresses the feelings, values, beliefs and practical knowledge of individuals and, in this study, applies to beginning teachers. The sociological context encompasses a variety of social interactions and focusses on the beginning teacher's inter-personal relationships in the school, community and school system. Elements which related to more than one context were characterized as being either dual or global in nature. The description of the data within these contexts promoted interpretation, insights and implications regarding the process of socialization within the selected school district.

**Conclusions and Implications**

The following conclusions and implications were drawn from the findings of the study:

1. Beginning teachers are being socialized to the practical, perhaps even mundane, teaching responsibilities to the exclusion of the philosophical or theoretical aspects of education.

The teachers in the study appeared for the most part to be unaware of school philosophies, mission statements, or educational values specific to their schools, and noted that no attention had been drawn to these aspects in the course of their first half-year of teaching. The researcher's perception of their lack of awareness and, moreover, lack of interest in this matter led to a speculation that either the newcomers did not feel invited to participate in the development of school philosophies and values, or they perceived such matters as belonging in the domain of administrators. School norms and expectations appear to have been learned on the job through personal systems of observation, experimentation and a certain degree of trial and error. There appeared to be little evidence of plans or formal structures by which a novice teacher would be acquainted with, or informed about, norms and expectations of pedagogical behaviour or standards of student achievement within the schools. Much in this area was left to the initiative of the beginning teachers to ask the right questions of appropriate people on a need to know basis, which suggests a reactive rather than proactive stance on the part of the school. The data imply that experienced school personnel demonstrate little acknowledgement or valuing of the philosophical and theoretical aspects of education. It is reasonable to assume that beginning teachers, who rely on the counsel and example of experienced colleagues, will align their educational priorities in like fashion. Therefore, a short term implication for the school

system is to foster a greater awareness of the fundamental nature of philosophy and theory in education and to encourage all school personnel to feel a sense of ownership in these areas. This would assist beginning teachers in being socialized to the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of education at the local and system levels.

An implication for teacher educators is a need to foster awareness in prospective teachers that schools and school systems do generate their own educational goals, philosophies, and mission statements, and to advise them of the necessity to request information relating to these areas when they commence their employment.

2. All initial experiences within the teaching role have the potential of being critical experiences for beginning teachers.

Although beginning teachers have been engaged in what Lortie (1975) termed as an "apprenticeship of observation" for at least a dozen years, and have enacted many teaching roles under the guidance of co-operating teachers in practice teaching, the adoption of full teaching responsibilities appears to have a significant impact upon them. For example, the teachers shared memorable impressions of meeting their own classes, establishing their own routines, developing their own programs, preparing their long range plans, conducting parent-teacher interviews, dealing with difficult students, receiving a supervisory visit, locating resources and materials, and supervising children in the school grounds — all for the first time. The private nature of teaching suggests that beginning teachers must be given the opportunity to experiment and test their abilities to handle these situations. However, inherent in these exploratory attempts are implications that empathetic colleagues and

administrators extend moral support, practical assistance, guidance, and advice. Beginning teachers must know in advance that such support is forthcoming.

A further implication relates to co-operating teachers in the final student teacher practica. The beginning teachers in this study recalled the ways in which co-operating teachers cushioned them, protected them, and generally served as buffers between the student teachers and critical incidents. It is possible that beginning teachers would feel better prepared to cope with the complex, practical realities of classroom teaching if more realistic responsibilities had been experienced in these potentially more supportive settings.

3. Although in the short term the beginning teachers were forced into trial-and-error and sink-or-swim situations, the outcomes of these experiences over the long term were generally positive in relation to the rapid development of coping skills, initiative, creative solutions, strategies and competences.

The data revealed accounts of initial experiences which could be described as involving unnecessary stress, uncertainty and isolation. For example, novice teachers being assigned to playground supervision on the first school day, being left to locate their own resources and materials, discovering where parent-teacher interviews would be held, and having to seek guidelines for the reporting of student progress, are situations which illustrate how these beginning teachers were forced to sink or swim without appropriate direction.

In response to many of these challenges the teachers in this study appeared to tap personal resources, which they may or may not have realized they possessed. They extended themselves to demonstrate that they could overcome difficulties by adapting, improvising, asking the right questions, and acquiring relevant information.

It is important to note that at the time of this study all of these beginning teachers felt that they had chosen the right career and wanted to remain in teaching.

An implication for school administrators is to recognize that beginning teachers and experienced teachers should not be accorded the same expectations with regards to responsibilities or time elements in such areas as long range planning and supervision schedules. In other words a more thoughtful and realistic assignment of teaching responsibilities should be considered for first year teachers.

Another implication for school systems and schools is to establish a teacher advisor, or mentor, system whereby guidance and assistance can be assigned formally and guaranteed to the newcomer. The implementation of a mentor program would ensure that a concerned, experienced teacher would systematically introduce and guide the beginning teacher through the host of initial experiences with which he or she is confronted.

4. For beginning teachers, experienced colleagues serve as vehicles for professional development whereas school principals serve as safety nets for professional survival.

The interview data revealed that beginning teachers sought and valued the ongoing professional advice and guidance of experienced colleagues in everyday teaching experiences. For example, experienced teachers shared their knowledge of planning strategies, evaluation methods, resources, and classroom management skills with the newcomers. Beginning teachers' natural inclination to turn to experienced teachers in these matters implies that personnel in non-evaluative positions might be less threatening and better suited to assist newcomers in developing their professional abilities.

The professional advice and guidance sought from school principals tended to relate to more extraordinary and problematic situations which required a higher level of power, authority or confirmation. Such situations included leadership in student discipline, decision-making for many expectations of students and staff, advocacy for the teacher's intent, and affirmation that the beginning teacher is succeeding. As there is only one principal per school a perceived lack of support from this authority figure would likely result in serious feelings of dislocation and vulnerability on the part of the beginning teacher. Of all staff members beginning teachers are the most vulnerable and most dependent on the leadership, support and counsel of school-based administrators. This raises the implication that school principals, while perhaps delegating the practical day to day guidance and assistance, be available, aware and empathetic in personal interaction with beginning teachers.

**Implications for educational stakeholders**. This research study raised various implications for preservice educators, central office personnel, school-based administrators, experienced colleagues, and beginning teachers themselves:

**Preservice educators.** The perceptions of six recent graduates revealed that generally much of their training was considered less than helpful in preparing them for the realities of teaching. This raises implications that:

1. Prospective teachers may benefit from an extension of the practicum experience. The teachers in the present study shared common perceptions that the practicum experience was most valuable to them and most relevant to their needs as beginning teachers. They noted that extended practica would be helpful in terms of bringing them into closer contact with children in real classrooms and real teaching situations. An extension of the practicum experience might be beneficial in helping

prospective teachers to recognize the relevance of course work which generally these beginning teachers appeared to discount.

2. Course work be directed toward extending practical knowledge of curriculum, content and materials. If more attention were directed toward extending such practical knowledge, it is possible that problems associated with planning and preparation in initial teaching experiences might be alleviated to some extent. The participants in the study indicated considerable amounts of energy and time were devoted to planning and preparation during the first term. Several of their comments suggested that they were learning about the curricula content while in the process of teaching it. This situation raises the possibility that under these pressure conditions there is little opportunity to reflect on aspects of teaching other than to impart the curriculum content as prescribed. It also places first year teachers in a position of being dependent on prescribed materials and text books.

3. Stronger recognition be accorded to the difficulties relating to individual student differences and classroom management. The interview data revealed that the beginning teachers felt ill-prepared to deal with the behaviours, attitudes and problems of some of their students and were in fact protected from this crucial area of teaching in their practicum teaching experiences. Perhaps the introduction of course work specific to this area could prove beneficial.

**Central office personnel.** The interview data indicated that beginning teachers have heightened awareness of the hierarchical nature of management and the evaluative role of central office personnel which implies that:

1. The principles of the original orientation meeting should be reinforced through at least one follow-up post-orientation session during the first term. The beginning teachers' generally positive comments relating to their initial introduction to

central office personnel appeared not to have been maintained over the first six months of teaching. Perhaps a post orientation session could be beneficial in sustaining lines of communication and also allow these first year teachers to ask pertinent questions, discuss evaluation procedures and share concerns or experiences with central office administrators in a non-threatening atmosphere.

2. Central office supervisors demonstrate ongoing collegial interest in beginning teachers' personal and professional well-being. The necessary supervisory role of central office administrators could be complemented by their acknowledgement that it is important to above all treat teachers as people with interests and commitments other than in the classroom.

**School-based administrators.** The beginning teachers' comments relating to school principals suggested that these administrators play a key role in the socialization process. First year teachers rely on the immediate support and leadership of principals which implies that:

1. School principals may benefit from inservice opportunities designed to sensitize them to the needs, problems, and concerns commonly experienced by beginning teachers. Some school principals appear to hold implicit assumptions that beginning teachers are either fully prepared to adopt all facets of classroom responsibilities or that "sink or swim" approaches are unavoidable in initial teaching experience. Whereas these attitudes may have had some basis of truth in past years, the growing complexity of current beginning teachers' responsibilities render any notions of survival of the fittest outdated. There may well be new learning experiences in this area that benefit the students, teachers and school as a whole.

2. School principals might develop means whereby appropriate experienced staff members are formally delegated as mentors for beginning teachers.

There is considerable support in the literature and the field that school principals' roles and responsibilities have expanded to the point that many are incapable of providing the types of assistance and support which may be required by beginning teachers. The delegation of mentoring roles might serve as a useful and practical alternative in such circumstances.

3. School principals should offer professional acknowledgement and recognition of experienced teachers' efforts to assist beginning teachers. In the absence of providing support systems themselves, school principals remain in the position to foster positive attitudes by providing recognition and encouragement to experienced teachers who accept those responsibilities. Such recognition could range from a simple thank you to a referral for written commendation from the superintendent.

**Experienced colleagues.** The beginning teachers' obvious valuing and need of collegial assistance pointed to important implications for those who would provide such assistance in that:

1. Experienced teachers may require appropriate inservice in developing effective mentoring skills and strategies. The role of mentor or teacher advisor, is not a simple one in that prospective mentors require consultative skills and strategies, knowledge of helping relationships and awareness of teaching and learning styles. Given the evidence of formal mental coursework and training in several of the United States (Thies-Sprinthall & Sprinthall, 1987) it is reasonable to assume that not all teachers are prepared to adopt mentor responsibilities and that inservice may be desirable.

2. There is a responsibility on the part of experienced teachers to model and demonstrate current educational knowledge and practice in their daily professional

lives. Experienced teachers appear to exert the strongest influence on the professional development of first year teachers. Beginning teachers enter their professional careers trained in current educational theory and practice. If current educational theory and practice is to be continued rather than discarded, it is important that new teachers see the application of those theories and practices as modelled by respected experienced colleagues.

**Beginning teachers**. The socialization experiences of the participants in the study emphasized the very active role which beginning teachers play in their own professional growth and development. Although many responsibilities are allocated to others, perhaps the greatest responsibility for professional survival rests or should rest in the person of the beginning teacher. This implies that:

1. Beginning teachers should select their teaching assignments thoughtfully and on the basis of their training and qualifications. Despite a certain idealism reflected by a statement such as this, the fact remains that the beginning teacher applies for and accepts or rejects a position. The difficulties encountered in initial teaching experience suggest that acceptance of an inappropriate teaching assignment could have a number of ramifications detrimental to entry into teaching. For example, unfamiliar subject areas or grade levels could result in unnecessarily negative experiences.

2. Beginning teachers develop their own personal resources. Such items as programs of study and curricular guides and resources, are fundamental tools of the trade for any teacher. Situations where such resources are allocated to beginning teachers at the commencement of the school year would seem to create unnecessary difficulties in their effective utilization. Materials and resources which

are prescribed provincially might be made available to prospective teachers through government outlets and university book stores at minimal cost.

3. Beginning teachers accept responsibility for accessing information and resources to facilitate their professional duties. Any individual entering a new position should take a proactive role in calling upon those with experience to share knowledge and insights specific to the given situation. The beginning teachers in the study indicated successful results from showing a considerable amount of personal initiative in accessing guidance and assistance as required.

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**Implications for further study**

The findings of the present study supported much of the literature relating to the needs, problems and concerns of beginning teachers in the socialization process. The universal nature of these findings suggests that further investigation into the experiences and situations shared by first year teachers be carried out. Suggestions for further research include:

1. Investigation into positive socialization experiences of successful first year teachers in order to understand those conditions which may be most conducive to an effective socialization process.

2. Closer examination of the status quo in order to determine whether or not present socialization practices are conducive to current educational philosophies and goals. In other words, are beginning teachers being socialized to education for the future or the past?

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